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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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CM accuses Modi of manipulating State funds

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condemned the Narendra Modi government for alleged manipulations of the State finances. Based on revelations from BVR Subramanyam, CEO NITI Aayog and an Al Jazeera article, he accused the government of covertly attempting to reduce States' tax share from 42 per cent to 32 per cent. He also criticised the rushed budget preparation, resulting in severe cuts to crucial welfare programs, particularly halving allocations for the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Off-budget borrowing is denounced for obscuring federal finances and central government compromising transparency. The statement also highlights a financial misconduct case in Jammu and Kashmir, implicating the BJP-led central government, motives behind the direct control of Jammu and Kashmir.*—Salar News*

3 jawans killed in explosion near LoC in J&K's Rajouri

RAJOURI/JAMMU, 18 JAN

Three soldiers were killed in a landmine explosion near the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Nowshera district on Thursday. The troops were patrolling the forward area in Nowshera sector when the incident occurred, the sources said. An official said the soldiers were hit by the explosion caused by the landmine when they "inadvertently stepped over it". *—PTI*

Central govt offices to remain closed for half a day on 22 Jan

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

All central government offices across the country will remain closed for half a day on 22 January, due to the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, a Personnel Ministry order issued on Thursday said. The 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony of the new idol of Ram Lalla at the sanctum sanctorum of the Ram temple is scheduled for Monday. The ceremony is set to be performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The Ram Lalla Pran Pratishtha at Ayodhya will be celebrated on 22 January 2024 across India. To enable employees to participate in the celebrations, it has been decided that all central government offices, central institutions and central industrial establishments throughout India will be closed for half day till 2.30 pm on 22 January 2024," it said.*—PTI*

Gruha Jyoti tweaked to help more families

Users who use less than 48 units will get 10 more units

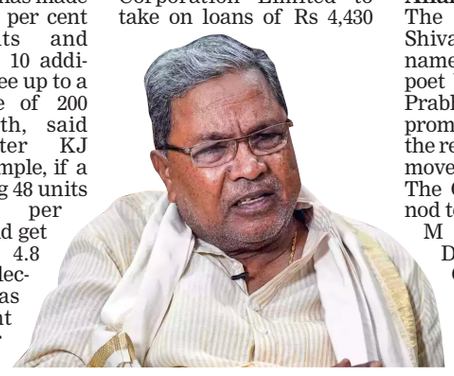
BENGALURU, 18 JAN

State Cabinet led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah made a major change in Gruha Jyothi scheme, which provides free electricity for up to 200 units per month.

The decision entails the provision of 10 additional units instead of 10% of the average utilisation by LT2 consumers who use less than 48 units monthly. Till now, the government calculated the free usage under the scheme after considering the average use of the consumer for the past 12 months and an additional 10 per cent was added to it as a bonus. Now, the Cabinet has made away with the 10 per cent additional units and instead will give 10 additional units for free up to a maximum usage of 200 units per month, said Energy Minister KJ George. For example, if a consumer is using 48 units of electricity per month, they would get an additional 4.8 units (10%) of electricity for free as per the present scheme. As per the new rules, a consumer using 48 units per month would get 10 units extra; so in total 58 units will be given for free.

The minister said they ushered in the change because many people were not getting zero bills and also to include more consumers under the scheme. The change will be a burden of Rs 500-600 crore annually to the exchequer.

Gruha Jyothi is one of the five guarantee schemes announced by the Congress government in the run-up to the State Assembly elections in May 2023. The Cabinet also gave its approval to offer a guarantee to the Karnataka Electricity Corporation Limited to take on loans of Rs 4,430 crore from banks and financial institutions.



Basavanna named cultural leader

Heeding the requests of the Lingayat community, the government has announced 12th-century social reformer Basavanna as the cultural leader of Karnataka. "The government will provide incentives to complete the construction of Anubhava Mantapa (established by Basavanna) in Bidar district in 2025," said Forest and Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre.

Shivamogga's Freedom Park to be named after Allama Prabhu

The Freedom Park in Shivamogga City is to be named after the famous poet Vachanakara Allama Prabhu. He was one of the prominent figures during the revolutionary Vachana movement in Karnataka.

The Cabinet also gave its nod to increase Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation's (KMDC) share capital from Rs 600 crore to Rs 1,200 crore.

—Salar News

CM to table 15th budget on 16 Feb

The Cabinet decided to hold the Assembly session from 12 to 23 February and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who holds the finance portfolio, will present the budget on 16 February. Siddaramaiah will be tabling his 15th budget on 16 February, in a record of sorts. Siddaramaiah was the finance minister from 1994 to 1999, and has also presented budgets as Chief Minister who was in charge of the Finance Ministry from 2013 to 18. Last year, he presented his 14th budget soon after Congress won the May elections

234 OF 1,226 CASES

K'taka reports highest no of JN1 cases

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

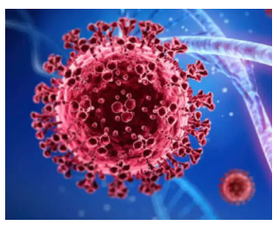


PHOTO: PTI

Karnataka has reported the highest number of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 cases with 234 infections

Meanwhile, 1,226 cases JN.1 have been reported in the country so far Data compiled by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) showed that 17 states and UTs have detected the presence of the variant. Karnataka has detected 234 cases of JN.1 sub-variant followed by Andhra Pradesh (189), Maharashtra (170), Kerala (156), West Bengal (96), Goa (90), Tamil Nadu (88) and Gujarat (76).

Rajasthan recorded 37 JN.1 cases, Telangana 32, Chhattisgarh 25, Delhi 16, Uttar Pradesh 7, Haryana five, Odisha three, and Uttarakhand and Nagaland one each, according to the data accessed by PTI.

The Centre has asked the states and Union Territories to maintain a constant vigil amid an uptick in the number of Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant in the country. The states have been urged to ensure effective compliance with the detailed operational guidelines for the revised surveillance strategy for Covid-19 shared with them by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The states have also been asked to regularly monitor and report district-wise cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) from all health facilities for early detection of a rising trend of Covid cases.

The World Health Organisation has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" (VOI) given its rapidly increasing spread but said it poses a "low" global public health risk. *—PTI*

'BAN ON GM CROPS AGAINST INDIA'S INTEREST'

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Making a strong case for growing genetically modified (GM) crops for enhanced food security, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Thursday that India is already importing huge quantities of edible oil extracted from genetically altered oilseeds for domestic consumption.

It said that, "unfounded fears" of their adverse impact is hurting farmers, consumers and industry.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told the court that approximately 55-60 per cent of edible oil consumed in India is imported.

The law officer told the court the total edible oil demand in India in 2020-21 was 24.6M tonnes while domestic availability stood at 11.1M tonnes.

The solicitor general said India is importing and consuming large quantities of edible oil extracted from GM oilseeds.

"India imports about 55,000 million tonnes of canola oil largely from GM canola seeds. Similarly, nearly 2.8 lakh tonnes of soybean oil is being imported annually, largely comprising GM soybean oil. Most exporting countries like Argentina, the US, Brazil and Canada cultivate GM soybean. Globally, around 80 per cent of soybean growing is GM soybean. *—PTI*

Navy rescues ship after drone attack in Gulf of Aden

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

In a swift operation, a guided missile destroyer of the Indian Navy intercepted a cargo vessel with 22 crew members, including nine Indians, little over an hour after the Marshall Island-flagged ship came under a drone strike in the Gulf of Aden on Wednesday night.

The strike on the cargo vessel MV Genco Picardy around 60 nautical miles South of Port Aden came amid increasing global concerns over attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea.

There was no report of any casualties and the fire on the vessel was contained, officials said.

The Indian Navy's frontline warship INS Visakhapatnam responded within an hour to the distress call by MV Genco Picardy following the drone attack at 11.11 pm on Wednesday, they said. The Indian Navy's EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) specialists boarded the vessel early Thursday morning to inspect the damaged area, they said, adding the vessel was cleared further transit following thorough scrutiny.

The vessel is proceeding to the next port of call.

It said the warship intercepted the vessels at 12.30 am on Thursday in order to provide assistance. Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said INS Visakhapatnam was undertaking anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden.

The Indian Navy on 5 January thwarted an attempted hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel MV Lila Norfolk in the North Arabian Sea and rescued all its crew members. *—PTI*

WHEN TWO GREATS MEET

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and World Chess Champion Grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand play chess during the Bangalore International Grandmasters Open Chess Tournament at Kanteerava Indoor Stadium in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

16 DIE AS BOAT OVERTURNS IN LAKE DURING PICNIC

VADODARA, 18 JAN

A school picnic turned tragic as 16 people --14 students and two teachers -- died after a boat overturned in a lake on the outskirts of Vadodara city in Gujarat on Thursday, police officials said.Two dozen students and four teachers were on a picnic and taking a boat ride in the Harni lake when the tragedy occurred in the afternoon, they said.A search operation was underway to trace the missing persons, the officials said."Till now, 14 children and two teachers have died in the tragedy. One student, who was rescued, is undergoing treatment at SSG Hospital," said an official of the Harni Police Station. *—PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

1 dead, 3 BSF jawans injured as fighting rages on in Manipur

IMPHAL, 18 JAN

- The mob, first, targeted the 3rd Indian Reserve Battalion at Khangabok in Thoubal district and security forces repelled them using minimum force.

At least three BSF personnel sustained bullet injuries after gunmen fired at security forces in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred late Wednesday night when the gunmen from a mob which "attempted to breach the Thoubal police headquarters" fired at the security personnel, a police statement said.

The mob, first, targeted the 3rd Indian Reserve Battalion at Khangabok in Thoubal district and security forces repelled them using minimum force.

"Further, the mob attempted to breach Thoubal police headquarters, prompting the security forces to use the force. Armed men from among the mob fired with live rounds," the police statement said.

The three, identified as Constable Gourav Kumar, ASI Sobram Singh and ASI Ramji, have been sent to a private hospital.

The district administration imposed a curfew in Thoubal. The fresh violence in Thoubal was reported after two Manipur Police commandos were killed and two sustained bullet wounds as heavily-armed militants targeted them in Moreh, a business town close to the Myanmar border, on Wednesday, officials said.

One killed as shootout continues

A village volunteer was killed in a gunfight between two warring communities in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, officials said on Thursday.

The shootout took place on Wednesday night after suspected militants launched an attack on Kangchup from the adjoining hill areas, prompting village volunteers in low-lying locality to retaliate, they said.

Following the killing, women in large numbers held a rally in Imphal on Thursday to protest against violence in the state and demanded the removal of the chairman of the inter-agency Unified Command. The women protesters took out the rally from the main market area of Imphal and marched towards the Chief Minister's Bungalow and the Raj Bhavan. They were stopped around 300 metres from the Raj Bhavan, leading to a confrontation between women protesters and security personnel.

Policemen fired tear gas shells to disperse the mob, the officials said.

Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year and over 180 people were killed. *—PTI*

Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year and over 180 people were killed *PHOTO: PTI*

EPFO removes Aadhaar as date of birth proof

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Retirement fund body EPFO has said it will no longer use Aadhaar as a valid document for proof of date of birth.

In an official circular on 16 January, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation said the decision to remove Aadhaar was taken following a directive from the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). As per the circular, Aadhaar is also being removed from the list of documents for correction in date of birth. The UIDAI in a circular on 22 December, 2023, had said an Aadhaar number can be used for establishing identity of an individual, subject to authentication, and thereby, per se, it is not a proof of date of birth. The UIDAI also noted that many bodies likes the EPFO have been using Aadhaar to validate date of birth. UIDAI had also said that many high courts in their orders have highlighted that Aadhaar is not a valid proof of date of birth. Various documents like birth certificate issued by the Registrar of Births and Deaths, mark sheet issued by government board or university, PAN card are used as valid proof for date of birth. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

'Parents must support unmarried girls'

PRAYAGRAJ, 18 JAN

Allahabad High Court has ruled that an unmarried daughter, irrespective of her religion or age, has the right to obtain maintenance from their parents under the Domestic Violence Act.

Court made the observation while dismissing a petition filed by Naimullah Sheikh and another under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. The parents of three daughters had challenged a lower court's order grating maintenance to them.

"There remains no doubt that an unmarried daughter, whether Hindu or Muslim, has a right to obtain maintenance, irrespective of her age. This is made clear again that the courts have to look for other laws applicable when the question pertains to the right to be maintained. However, where the issue does not pertain to mere maintenance, the independent rights are available to an aggrieved under section 20 of the domestic violence act itself," Justice Jyotsna Sharma observed.

The three daughters had filed a case in a court claiming maintenance under the Act, alleging mistreatment by their father and stepmother. The trial court ordered interim maintenance, which was challenged by the respondents arguing that the daughters were adults and financially independent.

In the decision dated 10 January , the court rejected the petitioners' argument that the daughters, being majors, cannot claim maintenance. *—PTI*

The parents of three daughters had challenged a lower court's order granting maintenance to them *PHOTO: PTI*

- In the decision dated 10 January , the court rejected the petitioners' argument that the daughters, being majors, cannot claim maintenance.

Kid ragpicker gets electrocuted in Chikkaballapur

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

An eight-year-old ragpicker got electrocuted on Thursday while he was trying to pull a guy rope fixed to a transformer adjacent to a drain at Manchenahalli in Chikkaballapuradistrict, according to officials of Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM). "While Nagendra pulled the guy wire it came in contact with the LT circuit and he got electrocuted," said a BESCOM official. Senior BESCOM officials visited the spot and were waiting for the report from the Electrical Inspectorate on the accident, he said. Justifying BESCOM an official said, "Since the authorities have warned the people many times not to go near the transformers adjacent to the road, there was no fault on the part of the BESCOM authorities," *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Ex-BJP MLA fined ₹60L in cheque bounce case

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Special Court of People's Representatives ordered former BJP MLA Sunil Hegde to pay a fine of Rs 60 in a cheque bounce case. The court said that failure to pay the fine would result in one year of imprisonment. The court said Hegde has to pay Rs 60 lakh as compensation to the complainant and Rs 10,000 has to be remitted to the government. The complainant, Sundaresh, was represented by Advocate KA Chandrasekhar. Hegde had issued a Rs 40 lakh cheque for loan repayment which had bounced following which the complainant Sundaresh filed a cheque case against Hegde. Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa was fined Rs 6.96 crore by the SCourt in a 2011 cheque bounce case. *—Salar News*

3 booked for molestation of woman in hotel

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

The City Police have registered a First Information Report (FIR) against three individuals in connection with an incident where a woman was molested at a hotel in the City. The victim had filed a complaint against the accused today. On Thursday, the police said that they have initiated a search for the three accused people who disappeared after the incident. According to the police, the incident occurred on 30 December, 2023, at Nammoota hotel in Vijayanagar around 7.30pm but the FIR was officially lodged on 10 January. The police said that the accused had formed a gang targeting young girls and women who visit hotels. They allegedly made a habit of touching them inappropriately, with one of the accused performing the act while the others watched and enjoyed. In case of any trouble, the three would gang up and escape from the scene. CCTV footage related to the incident has been collected by the police. *—Salar News*

Man abused over Ram pic as Whatsapp profile, 2 held

KOLAR, 18 JAN

Bethamangala police in Kolar district arrested two people including a minor for allegedly passing derogatory remarks against a person who sported the portrait of Lord Ram on his WhatsApp profile picture. The incident came to light when some villagers of Sundarapalya noticed derogatory remarks against the person going viral on social media on Thursday morning. They soon alerted Bethamangala police who arrested the accused. The case wastransferred to CEN station KGF under cybercrime. The accused are said to be residents of Sundarapalya village in Bangarpet taluk. *—Salar News*

36 MLAs, 39 Cong workers to play key roles in boards, corps

DyCM said that Congress will win at least 25 Lok Sabha seats

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said 36 legislators and 39 Congress workers will be appointed to key positions in state-run boards and corporations. He said the list would be released "any moment".

"36 legislators and 39 party workers have been accommodated in the appointments to boards and corporations. The party leaders and workers have brought the party to power in the state and they have been rewarded suitably," Shivakumar, who is also Karnataka Congress unit President, told reporters here. Meanwhile, he said a meeting of the party's Lok Sabha election committee would be held here on Friday. "We will have the first round of meeting tomorrow. Jagadish Shettar and Laxman Savadi (who joined the Congress from the BJP before the Assembly elections in May last year) have also been invited to the meeting. District in-charge ministers have collected opinions from all the constituencies and it will be discussed in tomorrow's meeting," Shivakumar said. On some Ministers reportedly reluctant to contest the Lok Sabha elections, he said, "If the party wants, everyone has to contest, whether it is me or anyone else." Shivakumar expressed confidence that the party would win at least 25 Lok Sabha seats of the total 28 in Karnataka.

Regarding the JD(S) joining the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, he said: "it is their wish".

"The last time we joined hands with JD(S), we were hopeful of winning a lot of seats but ended up with one seat each," Shivakumar noted. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections,BJP won 25 seats and Congress and JD(S) one each. An independent backed by the BJP also emerged victorious.On some BJP leaders' reported comments that Congress would suffer a "setback" in Lok Sabha elections for its stand on the Ram temple issue, he said, "There is Rama in (Chief Minister) Siddaramaiah and there is Shiva in Shivakumar. Faith is a private matter. I believe in all faiths. There should be 'dharma' in politics but there should not be any politics in 'dharma'." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

> **The party leaders and workers have brought the party to power in the state and they have been rewarded suitably,"**
>
> -DK Shivakumar
> Deputy Chief Minister

DESPITE FINANCIAL AID

State to recover ₹75cr from firms for skill edu failure

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

The State has ordered against eight project implementing agencies (PIAs) that failed to deliver skill education despite receiving financial aid under the Deen Dayal Grameen Kaushalya Yojana.

During the meeting at Vikas Soudha on Thursday, Sharan Prakash Patil, Minister for Medical Education, Skill Development, and Livelihood, instructed officials to blacklist these companies, file criminal cases against them, and recover Rs 74.65 crore with interest for violating scheme rules.

The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, initiated on the 98th birth anniversary of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, aims to provide free vocational training or skill education to unemployed youths aged 18 to 35, facilitating their employment in the private sector.

Sharan Prakash Patil PHOTO: PTI

Further Patil noted the strict action against them. He said, "The concerned officials must visit the training centres at the district and taluk levels every month and review the progress. And the lower-rung officials must submit reports to the senior officers. I will be holding monthly meetings to review the progress and will not hesitate to act against those showing laxity," he said. *—Salar News*

Nearly 46,000 people from City had filed petitions in SC against the remission granted to the 11 convicts PHOTO: SALAR

City celebrate SC verdict on Bilkis case

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Bengalureans on Thursday united to celebrate Supreme Court's verdict on the Bilkis Bano case. The City reverberated with joy as nearly 46,000 people from the City had filed petitions in Supreme Court against the remission granted to the 11 convicts by the Gujarat government who were accused of raping Bilkis.

Over 200 people from all walks of life gathered under the pink blooms in Freedom Park and sang 'Preetiya Gaali Beesutide' the gist of which means 'Love will win'.

The celebrations came after Bilkis' 20-year battle against the convicts.

Bengalureans hailed Bilkis' perseverance and said that her struggle taught them to fight their toughest battles in life without giving up.

Speaking to Salar News, one of the celebrators said, "Nothing is stronger than a woman raising her voice against the wrongs happening to her. Women such as Bilkis represent power."

Arvash, an LGBTQ and human rights activist said, "Bilkis is the victim of the gang rape and she struggled for more than two decades but the release of the convicts shows us how the women's rights were taken away from her."

On 8 January, 2024, Supreme Court quashed Gujarat's decision and ordered the 11 convicts to surrender within two weeks. *—Salar News*

PUTHIGE MUTT SEER ASCENDS PARYAYA PEETA IN UDUPI

MANGALURU, 18 JAN

Sri Sugunendra Teertha, Chief of the Puthige mutt, ascended the 'Paryaya Peeta' (sacred seat) at Udupi Sri Krishna temple amid festivities in the small hours on Thursday. For the next two years, the Paryaya seer will oversee the administration and pujas at the Udupi Sri Krishna temple, as per the traditional cyclic rotation of the administration among the eight mutts of Udupi. Sri Sugunendra Teertha Swami took a holy dip at Dandatheertha lake in Kaup at 1.30am and reached Jodukatte to take part in the rituals and grand Paryaya procession. He was accompanied by pontiff Sri Susheendra Teertha. Earlier, tableaus, 'pili vesha' teams joined the procession. *—PTI*

VANDALISATION OF TOMBS

Panel formed to resolve Baba Budangiri dispute

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

A cabinet sub-committee consisting of five ministers has been constituted to file an objection in Supreme Court in a case related to the vandalisation of tombs at Baba Budangiri or Datta Peetha in Chikkamagaluru.

The committee is headed by Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara, Law Minister HK Patil, Transport and Muzrai Minister Ramalinga Reddy, Revenue Minister Krishna Byregowda and Chikkamagaluru In-charge Minister KJ George.

The decision was taken in the cabinet meeting held on Thursday in Vidhana Soudha by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Earlier, the state government had formed an administrative board regarding the appointment of priests at the disputed site. There are a total of eight people including one Muslim member in this governing body. The State government had informed in a circular that the governing body has the power to appoint priests.

Baba Budangiri, often referred to as South India's Ayodhya, has long been a pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Muslims. Hindus believe the hill is the final resting place of Lord Dattatreya, while Muslims consider the dargah as one of the earliest centres of Sufism in South India. However, over the years, the BJP, Bajrang Dal, VHP, and other saffron outfits have been advocating for the shrine to be declared a Hindu temple. *—Salar News*

Baba Budangiri, referred to as South India's Ayodhya, has long been a pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Muslims PHOTO: IANS

CM'S CHALLENGE TO PM SHOWS ARROGANCE: HDK

BENGALURU/ NEW DELHI 18 JAN

Former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy criticised Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's recent challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a public debate on the release of funds for Karnataka's drought relief. Addressing media in New Delhi, he described the action of the Chief Minsiter as the "height of arrogance."

Kumaraswamy, who recently met Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and BJP President JP Nadda regarding JDS's alliance with the BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, urged the Congress to focus on addressing lapses and engage in constructive discussions with the Centre.

He highlighted the need for mutual cooperation and suggested that the Chief Minister should learn from other states. He praised Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for maintaining a working relationship with the Centre despite political differences.

Furthermore, Kumara swamy dismissed rumours of his potential inclusion of being Union Minister in the Modi cabinet and reaffirmed his commitment to the BJP-JDS alliance securing all 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka. Regarding the upcoming Lok Sabha elections he said, he is facing pressure from party workers to contest in the polls from Tumakuru, Chikka ballapur, Mandya, and Bengaluru Rural parliamentary constituencies.

He stated that the final decision on his candidature would be determined collectively by leaders from both the JDS, and BJP. *—Salar News*

HD Kumaraswamy PHOTO: PTI

Simmha accuses CM of using son to target DKS

MP Pratap & Chief Minister Siddaramaiah PHOTO: SALAR

MYSURU, 18 JAN

Mysuru-Kodagu MP Pratap Simmha alleged that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is using his son Yathindra Siddaramaiah to target Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar.

Simmha said Yathindra will be a suitable opponent for him in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He claims he is ready for a political showdown between Yathindra and himself.

Simmha dismissed worries about Congress candidates performing better. He added that the party is in disarray regarding Lok Sabha candidates. He asserted that there is no confusion between BJP and JD(S) over seat sharing. He claims to have the blessings of leaders from both parties in his constituency. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

For 1st time, no animal sacrifice in Jodi Jatra

CHAMARAJANAGA, 18 JAN

For the first time in its history, Jodi Muniyappa Jatra Mahotsav witnessed the offering of Satvik pooja (holistic yogic pooja) instead of the customary animal sacrifice that has been a part of the celebration for many years.

Jodi Muniyappa Jatra Mahotsav is an annual fair held in Kudlur at the Tamil Nadu border of Hanur taluk in Chamarajanagar. The fair held once every three years always culminated with animal sacrifice. However, this year the animal sacrifice was not done in adherence to the ban. *—Salar News*

RAM TEMPLE CONSECRATION

Live telecast to mass lunch: City gears up for Ram Mandir

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Groups of people across the City are planning to telecast the Ram Mandir inauguration live on live on LED screens followed by mass food distribution on 22 January. Jain community has come forward to sponsor most of the events.

Industries in Peenya have also decided to shut shop after the event on that day. "It is a historic day for all of us and we have decided to screen the Ram Mandir consecration live on LED screens for the benefit of people. Our brothers from the Jain community are working with us in tandem for the smooth conduct of the event. After the consecration we plan to have a mass food distribution as part of the celebrations," Ayyapaneni R Chakradhar Reddy, an organiser of one such event at Banjara Layout in Horamavu said. In fact, some of the private schools in the City will also telecast the consecration ceremony.

R Harish, a resident of Jayanagar 4th Block, said, "It is indeed an important day for all of us and a few days ago all the youngsters in the area decided to put up tents and screen the event live."

The City police are yet to make an announcement on these celebrations and the norms to be followed about road closures and traffic management.

Youngsters, youth groups and some resident associations have also planned other programmes on 22 January. State BJP and pro-Hindu organisations have launched a massive campaign to visit Hindu households and distribute 'akshate' (unbroken rice grains coated with haldi and kumkum) and images of the Ram temple. *—Salar News*

Lord Ram merchandise is seeing a spike in sales as consecration ceremony date draws close PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Pottery Town sees surge in diya orders

Bengaluru,18 Jan

As the days for Ram Mandir's inauguration nears, the demand for earthen diyas has gone up.Potters in City's Pottery Town in Pulakeshinagar got bulk orders of diyas. A Shri Rama Sena trust from JP Nagar has ordered 28,000 pieces of diyas from Raja in Pottery town. Each piece is being sold at Rs 6. "Apart from Deepavali, this is the first time we have received such a bulk order. It is planning to distribute diyas to temples. *—Salar News*

Hospital announces free delivery

Vijayapura, 18 Jan

A private hospital in Vijayapura has announced free delivery of newborns at its facility from 18 to 22 January to celebrate the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya on Monday. The decision was announced by the 'Shri Siddeshwar Loka Kalyana Charitable Trust', which runs the JSS Super Speciality Hospital here. Vijayapura MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal hailed the initiative as "Ayodhya Celebration". *—PTI*

Ramanagara man to play 'Mangal Vadya'

RAMANAGARA, 18 JAN

Ramanagara resident Vijay Kumar has received an invitation from Ram Mandir Trust to play Mangal Vadya in Ayodhya's newly built temple. Mangal Vadya is a reed instrument with seven holes along the tube. He will be in Ayodhya for 48 days playing Mangal Vadya for Lord Ram devotees along with his ten team members consisting of four nadaswaram players, four drummers, one saxophone player, and two tala-shruti (rhythm instrument) players Kumar, a seasoned drummer, has been playing Mangal Vadya on Ram Navami in Ayodhya since 2008. *—Salar News*

HC refuses to stay eviction notice to Moitra

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The Delhi High Court Thursday refused to stay the eviction notice issued to expelled Lok Sabha member of TMC Mahua Moitra asking her to vacate her government accommodation. Justice Girish Kathpalia said no specific rule has been brought before the court which would deal with the eviction of members of Parliament from government accommodation after they cease to be MPs."To conclude, in view of the pendency of the issue of expulsion of petitioner (Moitra) before the Supreme Court and the issue of extension of time to vacate the government accommodation being inextricably linked with that, coupled with the fact that as on date petitioner has no right, this court is not inclined to invoke jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India at this stage to restrain the operation of the impugned eviction order.—*PTI*

ACB raids Sena (UBT) MLA's premises

Mumbai, 18 Jan

Maharashtra Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday conducted raids at multiple premises of Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA RajanSalvi in Ratnagiri district, and filed a case against him and his two family members for allegedly amassing disproportionate assets, an official said.The raids were conducted by a team of the ACB's Thane unit at five premises belonging to Salvi in the coastal district, he said.Salvi is a three-time legislator representing the Rajapur Assembly constituency. He belongs to the Uddhav Thackeray-led faction of the Shiv Sena.According to the official, Salvi, his wife and son amassed assets to the tune of Rs 3.53 crore, which are allegedly disproportionate to their known sources of income.An offence under sections 13 (1) (B) and 13 (2) under the Prevention of Corruption Act against Salvi, his wife and son, he said. —*PTI*

Calcutta HC allows TMC's rally on 22 Jan

KOLKATA, 18 JAN

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday allowed the ruling Trinamool Congress to hold a Sampriti (harmony) rally here on 22 January, the same day as the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.The court directed the West Bengal government to ensure that peace is maintained during the rally.The court, however, did not pass any order on a request by petitioner SuvenduAdhikari, leader of the opposition in the West Bengal assembly and BJP MLA, for deployment of paramilitary forces in the state on that day. Adhikari's counsel told the court that permission had been granted for 35 programmes in the city related to the consecration of Ram temple, from 11 am to 5 pm on 22 January.The court did not grant Adhikari's prayer for not allowing the Sampriti rally on the same day due to concerns about potential unrest.—*PTI*

Rajasthan CM receives death threat

JAIPUR, 18 JAN

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma has received a death threat from a prisoner lodged inside a jail here, officials said on Thursday.Minister of State for Home Jawahar Singh Bedham said immediate action was taken and two staffers of the Central Jail, Jaipur were suspended and a case registered against them.According to officials, the action was taken against the duo for failing to check the smuggling of mobile phones inside the jail. Bedham said to ensure that such an incident does not happen again, a search campaign for mobile phones inside all jails will be conducted soon.The inmate, booked under the Protection Of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) Act, on Wednesday, called a police control room from a mobile phone and threatened to kill Sharma on Wednesday, officials said. —*PTI*

Kejriwal skips ED summons for 4th time, calls it 'illegal'

In his reply, Kejriwal said he is busy with budget preparations for Delhi

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday refused to depose before the Enforcement Directorate for the fourth time and termed the summonses issued to him "illegal" and part of a "political conspiracy" to arrest him before the LokSabha polls.

In his reply to the summons, Kejriwal said he is busy with the budget preparations for Delhi. The Delhi budget will be presented in the Assembly in the session starting from February 15.

According to sources, he also accused the ED of using "derogatory language" in its communication and said that it "displays your disrespect for the constitutional office of the chief minister and your predetermination in the matter".

Earlier in the day, Kejriwal attended the Excellence in Education Awards of the Delhi government and then left for Goa as per his schedule to take stock of the AamAadmi Party's preparations for the LokSabha polls, sources said.

On the sidelines of the Delhi government event, when he was asked about the ED summonses, Kejriwal said he was

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal ***PHOTO: ANI***

issued a summons by the central probe agency last week for the fourth time, asking him to appear before it on 18 or19 January.

"The BJP is running the ED. They only intend to arrest me so that I cannot campaign for the upcoming LokSabha elections," the chief minister alleged and said that he has sent his reply to the central agency.

"The four notices sent to me are illegal... Such general, non-specific notices have been quashed in the past by the courts. I have repeatedly written to the ED, saying the notices are illegal but they have not replied to me," he told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

Alleging that the notices are being sent under a "political conspiracy", Kejriwal said the probe into the excise policy case has been going on for two years but "nothing" has been found yet. "False statements are being extracted out of people by beating them," he alleged.

According to AAP sources, Kejriwal refused to appear in person before the Enforcement Directorate as he found the probe agency's communication accompanying the fourth summons issued on 12 January as "arbitrary, mala fide and illegal". —*PTI*

RAHUL TAKES A DIG

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses a press conference during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, at Chiephobozou near Kohima ***PHOTO: PTI***

Assam govt most corrupt in India: Rahul Gandhi

SIVASAGAR/ JORHAT, 18 JAN

Kickstarting the Assam leg of 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed the state perhaps has the "most corrupt government" and the "most corrupt CM" in the country.

Addressing party workers at Halowating in Sivasagar district, where the march entered Assam from Nagaland, Gandhi slammed the ruling BJP and its ideologue Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for "spreading hatred and looting public money".

"Perhaps, the most corrupt government in India is in Assam. You know what is happening here. We will raise the issues of Assam during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'," he told party workers. Talking about Manipur, from where the march began, Gandhi said a civil war-like situation is in the hill state with ethnic violence going on since 3 May last year.

"Manipur is divided and the Prime Minister has not even once visited the state. In Nagaland, a framework agreement (to bring about a solution to the Naga political issue) was signed nine years ago and people are now asking what happened to it," the Congress MP said. —*PTI*

GANDHI FAMILY MOST CORRUPT IN INDIA: HIMANTA

GUWAHATI, 18 JAN

Himanta Biswa Sarma ***PHOTO: X***

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday alleged that the Gandhi family is the most corrupt one in the country.His statement came following Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's accusations that the BJP-led government in Assam is the most corrupt in the country. "The Gandhi family is the most corrupt family in the country. This is not 'NyayYatra, it's 'MiyaYatra'. Wherever there are Muslims, they visit those places," the chief minister told a press conference. 'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. — *PTI*

Will take forward developmental partnership with Maldives: India

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Randhir Jaiswal ***PHOTO: PTI***

India on Thursday said it remains committed to take forward its development agenda with the Maldives including implementation of various welfare projects in the island nation.

The comments by External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came amid strain in ties between the two countries following Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu's call for withdrawal of Indian military personnel from his country by 15 March.

"We remain committed to our projects and to take them forward. We have been an important development partner of the Maldives," he said at his weekly media briefing while replying to a question.

"We remain committed to doing all things that we can do as a development partner of the Maldives," Jaiswal added.

On Male insisting on withdrawal of Indian troops, he suggested that the matter will be deliberated upon at the second meeting of India-Maldives core group. The next core group meeting is set to take place in New Delhi early next month.

The issue of the Indian military personnel was extensively discussed at the first meeting of the core group in Male on 14 January. "Both sides held discussions on finding mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac (medical evacuation) services to the people of Maldives," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement following the meeting.

The India-Maldives ties came under some stress as Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, maintained after assuming charge as the president in November that he will keep his election promise of evicting Indian military personnel from his country. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male. —*PTI*

Parl breach: Court denies bail to Neelam

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

A Delhi court on Thursday dismissed the bail application of Neelam Azad, arrested in the Parliament security breach case, noting that the investigation was at a nascent stage and she was accused of attempting to disrupt the sovereignty and integrity of India.

Additional Sessions Judge HardeepKaur said the FIR in the case was registered under various sections of anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Indian Penal Code.

She said since the investigation was in the initial stage, it was not a fit case for bail.

"In view of the above discussions, considering the nature and seriousness of allegations levelled against the applicant /accused and the initial stage of investigation, I do not find it to be a fit case to release the applicant/accused on bail. The present bail application stands dismissed, the judge said.Court had on Saturday sent all the accused in the case, including Azad, Manoranjan D, Sagar Sharma, LalitJha, AmolShinde and Mahesh Kumawat, to judicial custody after they were produced before it on expiry of their police remand.

In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack, two people -- Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D -- jumped into the LokSabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow gas from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by some MPs.Around the same time, two other accused -- AmolShinde and Azad -- also sprayed coloured gas from canisters outside Parliament premises. —*PTI*

C'garh mayor poll on stay as officer falls sick

CHANDIGARH, 18 JAN

Chandigarh mayoral polls, slated to be held on Thursday, were deferred till further orders after the Presiding officer fell sick, claimed several municipal councillors of the Congress and the AAP, citing a message they received from the municipal authorities.

The meeting for polling through secret ballot was to take place at 11 am in the Assembly hall of the municipal corporation.

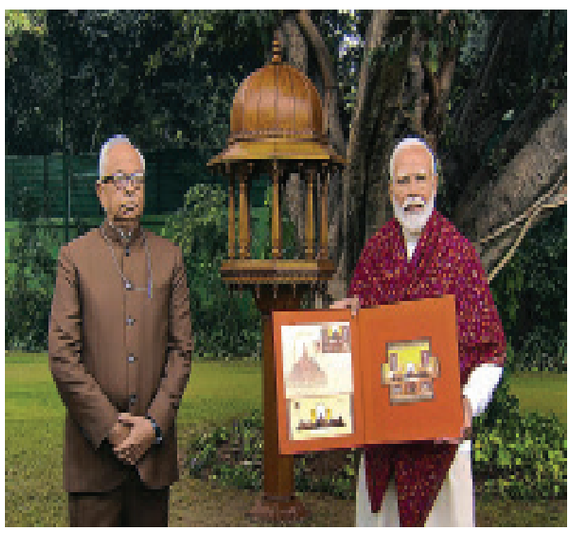
However, there was no official word on postponing the mayoral polls.

Several councillors received a message on an official WhatsApp group saying: "It is informed that a telephonic message has been received regarding the ill health of Anil Masih, who has been nominated as presiding authority for the meeting scheduled on 18 January for the post of Mayor u/60 (a) read with Regulation 6 (1) of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation (Procedure and Conduct of Business) Regulation, 1996. In view of the above, it is requested not to reach the MC office till further orders are received."

Senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal also claimed that they have been informed that elections will not take place on Thursday as the presiding officer has fallen sick.

The development triggered protests by the Congress and the AAP councillors who were fighting the polls in an alliance under the INDIA bloc.AAP moves HC over deferment of polls

AAP on Thursday moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court, seeking appointment of a new presiding officer in place of Anil Masih after he "fell sick" leading to the deferment of the Chandigarh mayoral polls.The petition was filed by AAP councillor Kuldeep Kumar, who is the candidate for mayor seat. The petitioner sought from the court for holding the mayoral polls.Congress and AamAadmi Party leaders slammed the BJP, accusing it of not allowing to hold the mayoral polls in the wake of its "imminent defeat". —*PTI*



Narendra Modi releases commemorative postage stamps on Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and a book of stamps issued on Lord Ram around the world, in Ayodhya ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ashok Tanwar quits AAP

CHANDIGARH, 18 JAN

In a setback to the AamAadmi Party (AAP) in Haryana, senior leader Ashok Tanwar quit the party on Thursday, expressing displeasure with its alignment with Congress.

In a letter to AAP national Convener ArvindKejriwal, Tanwar wrote, "In view of the current political scenario and your alignment with the Indian National Congress, my ethics won't allow me to continue as chairman, Election Campaign Committee, AamAadmi Party Haryana."

"Therefore, kindly accept my resignation from primary membership and all other responsibilities of the AamAadmi Party," he added. —*PTI*

DMK not against Ram Mandir: Udhayanidhi

CHENNAI, 18 JAN

DMK leader and Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Thursday said his party is not against the Ram temple at Ayodhya but is opposed to the shrine coming up after "demolishing a mosque".

The late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi had stated that DMK is not against a particular religion or faith, Udhayanidhi said."We are not in agreement with the construction of a temple after demolishing a mosque," the DMK Youth Wing chief said, referring to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. "Our Treasurer (T R Baalu) has already stated that spiritualism and politics should not be mixed," Udhayanidhi, said. —*PTI*

'Ganesh Pujan' to be held as part of rituals

AYODHYA, 18 JAN

'Ganesh Pujan' and 'VarunPujan' will be held on Thursday as part of the rituals being performed in the run-up to the 22 January consecration ceremony at the Ram temple here, a priest said.

The idol of Ram Lalla was brought inside the sanctum sanctorum of the temple on Wednesday night while a 'KalashPujan' was held earlier in the day. The rituals started on Tuesday, and Ram temple trust general secretary ChampatRai said that these will continue till 21 January.

"The idol of Ram Lalla has been kept inside the sanctum sanctorum but it is not 'virajmaan' (installed) yet. There is a technical issue and engineers will be looking into it," priest Arun Dixit told PTI. He said 121 priests will be assigned puja tasks and there will also be a 'Vastu Puja' outside the sanctum sanctorum on the temple premises. —*PTI*

Tharoor's 'switching sides' reply to Scindia

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Firing a fresh salvo at Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia over the chaos at the Delhi airport due to fog-related flight delays, Congress leader ShashiTharoor on Thursday said it's a pity that since switching sides, Scindia has adopted the Modi government's "uncaring attitude" to the public.

Tharoor issued a series of six posts in a point-by-point rebuttal of Scindia's arguments and said the minister would be better served by shifting his focus from "my arm-chair and my diligent researchers to the agony of the passengers".

"Perhaps, then he would find time to fix the myriad incompetencies, absolute lack of preparation, and the glaring loopholes in his Ministry's functioning," Tharoor said.Scindia had claimed on Wednesday that Tharoor is "lost in his esoteric world of thesaurus", and for him "data mining of selective press articles from the internet qualifies as "research".Thecaustic response came after Tharoor had alleged chaos at the Delhi airport is a result of the 'neglect'. —*PTI*

POLL PREPARATIONS

We are targetting 14 LS seats from Telangana: Mansoor Ali Khan

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

With the 2024 LokSabha polls just months away, Telangana Congress is gearing up for a direct battle with the BhartiyaJanata Party, while setting sights on 14 Lok Sabha seats.

In an interview to **Salar News**, Mansoor Ali Khan, AICC Secretary in-charge of Telangana discussed in detail his party's strategy in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

Salar News: What are the lessons from the Telangana Assembly elections and how will those be applied in the selection of candidates for LokSabha 2024?

Mansoor Ali Khan: The 2024 LokSabha elections are a fight between the BJP and the Congress. The BRS has been reduced to a 'fair weather party' which may ultimately end up supporting the BJP.

In the Assembly elections, Congress has not done well in Greater Hyderabad, Hyderabad (Old City) and Northern Telangana. However, the maximum number of applications for the PrajaPalana Scheme launched by the new Telengana government have come from these three areas. This is very encouraging for us.

Salar News: Will you adopt the same model of surveys, used during Assembly polls, for giving tickets in the LokSabha elections?

MAK: The criteria of the candidate will be his or her ability to win. Winning the election is the most important aspect. So like assembly elections, the due diligence in terms of surveys and assessment of candidates will be done. Based on that, the party will decide.

Salar News: There was a lot of discontent during the Assembly elections where those who worked for the party for a long time, were denied tickets. That had led to some of them leaving and many had to be pacified. How are you planning to deal with this?

Mansoor Ali Khan ***PHOTO: @MANSOORKHANINC/ X***

MAK: In the LokSabha elections, we are looking at 14 seats from Telangana. For that, we want 'electable' candidates. The elections in South India are fought on various fronts and the candidate has to be strong on the ground and also able to campaign. If the survey shows that a particular candidate is good on both fronts and has a chance of winning, the ticket will be issued. There is now a set method which will be followed. Those who are not happy will be accommodated at a later date.

Salar News: Rahul Gandhi has said that youth and women will be given a chance to contest in elections. What is your strategy on that front?

MAK: The party is very keen on youth and women contesting the elections and we are looking at probable candidates in both the categories.

Salar News: What about Hyderabad parliamentary seat?

MAK: In Hyderabad, our focus will be on dealing with the menace of bogus voting. We have asked party workers and assembly representatives to remain extra vigilant about this issue.

Salar News: There is a high percentage of Muslims in Telangana, but the Congress government has not given any post to members of the community leader. For the LokSabha elections, will there be adequate Muslim representation?

MAK: Let us be fair here and say that there is no other party in the country which has the interests of the minorities as part of their agenda. We are confident about the Muslims voting for the Congress in the LokSabha elections. The posts will be decided after the elections.

Salar News: The Ram Mandir issue will continue to dominate the LokSabha elections? How is the Congress going to deal with it?

MAK: The party's stand is out in the open. We do not mix religion with politics. We want to address issues confronting the people of this country, which include inflation, unemployment, lack of infrastructure, lack of access to healthcare, crime against women etc.

—*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

FIR against gaming site over Tendulkar's deepfake video

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

The Mumbai police have registered a case against a gaming site and a Facebook page after Sachin Tendulkar raised concerns over a deepfake video that falsely showed that the cricketing legend was promoting its gaming app, an official said on Thursday. The deepfake also sought to create an impression that Tendulkar and his daughter Sara had won large sums of money by playing a certain online game. According to the complaint, the video was edited and posted on Facebook. It said deepfake technology was used to mimic Tendulkar's gesture and voice. At this stage, the police did not share details about the owner of the gaming site and the Facebook page. Tendulkar himself had flagged the fake video on his X handle. *—PTI*

Student stabs prof at college in Kerala, absconds

KOCHI, 18 JAN

A case has been registered against a student of a government college here for allegedly stabbing an Assistant Professor inside the campus following an argument over the suspension of fellow student, police said on Thursday. Nizamuddin KM, working as an Assistant Professor with the Research Department of Arabic in Maharaja's College, lodged a complaint with the police here alleging that he was stabbed by Mohammed Rashid using a knife on Wednesday. According to the complainant, the accused had entered into an argument with him at the Department over the suspension of another student. In a fit of rage, the student stabbed him with a sharp object from behind. Police said the accused is absconding. *—PTI*

Court orders Gyanvapi complex keys be handed

VARANASI, 18 JAN

A district court has ordered that the keys of the basement located in the Gyanvapi complex here, known as "Vyas ji ka tehkhana", be handed over to the district magistrate. District Judge AK Vishwesh said in his order on Wednesday that there is a need for taking proper care of the basement of Vyas ji located at the southern end of the complex, Hindu side's counsel Madan Mohan Yadav said. "Therefore, district magistrate of Varanasi is appointed receiver of Vyas ji's basement," the court said. Yadav had earlier said that authorities had barricaded and locked the basement in 1993. Prior to it, the basement was used for worship by Somnath Vyas, a priest, Yadav had claimed in his plea. *—PTI*

EAM to represent India at NAM Summit in Uganda

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the two-day summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the Ugandan capital city of Kampala beginning Friday. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), announcing Jaishankar's two-nation visit to Uganda and Nigeria. NAM Summit under the leadership of Uganda brings together more than 120 developing countries. It said Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs V Muraleedharan will represent India at the 'G-77 Third South Summit' to be in Kampala on 21 and 22 January. The theme of the summit is 'Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence', and it will be preceded by deliberations at the ministerial and senior officials levels. Jaishankar is expected to meet with the Ugandan counterparts. *—PTI*

Why selective public interest on fake encounters: Guj to SC

The apex court had earlier appointed a monitoring authority

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

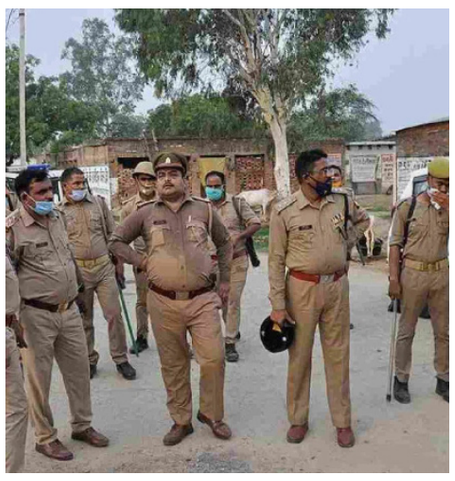


Photo for representational purpose only

PHOTO: PTI

Gujarat government told Supreme Court that the petitioners who have sought a probe into the alleged fake encounters in the state from 2002 to 2006 must explain the reasons for "selective public interest" in raising the issue.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta was hearing two separate pleas filed in 2007 by senior journalist BG Verghese, and noted Javed Akhtar and Shabnam Hashmi, seeking a probe into the alleged fake encounters. Verghese died in 2014 on Thursady.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state, told the bench that encounters have taken place in other states also.

"The petitioners will have to satisfy the court about their selective public interest," Mehta asserted.

The apex court had earlier appointed a monitoring authority headed by former top court judge Justice H S Bedi which had probed 17 alleged fake encounter cases in Gujarat from 2002 to 2006.

The committee, which had submitted its report in a sealed cover in 2019, recommended prosecution of police officials in three out of the 17 cases it probed.

During the hearing on Thursday, advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the petitioners, said the committee report has already come before the court.

"All that is needed to be done is to prosecute those persons who have been identified in the report," he said, adding the panel has come to a conclusion in three cases.

The bench posted the pleas for hearing after two weeks.

In its final report filed in the apex court, the Justice Bedi committee had said three persons -- Sameer Khan, Kasam Jafar and Haji Ismail -- were prima facie killed in fake encounters by police.

It had indicted a total of nine police officials, including three inspector rank officers. It, however, did not recommend prosecution of any IPS officer.

- The committee, which had submitted its report in a sealed cover in 2019, recommended prosecution of police officials in three out of the 17 cases it probed

On 9 January, 2019, a bench headed by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi had rejected the Gujarat government's plea to maintain confidentiality of the final report of the committee and ordered that it be given to petitioners.

The panel had also dealt with 14 other cases which related to alleged fake encounter killings of Mithu Umar Dafer, Anil Bipin Misra, Mahesh, Rajeshwar, Kashyap Harpalsingh Dhaka, Salim Gagji Miyana, Jala Popat Devipujak, Rafiksha, Bheema Maanda Mer, Jogindrasinh Khatansing, Ganesh Khunte, Mahendra Jadav, Subhash Bhaskar Nayyar and Sanjay. *—PTI*

GANG-RAPE & MURDER

Bilkis' 5 convicts move SC, seek time to surrender

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Bilkis Bano PHOTO: PTI

Five convicted of gang-raping Bilkis Bano and massacring seven members of her family during the 2002 communal riots moved Supreme Court on Thursday seeking more time to surrender.

This comes days after Supreme Court quashed the remission the Gujarat government had granted them.

The top court had on 8 January annulled the remission the Gujarat government granted to the 11 convicts in the high-profile case while slamming the State for being "complicit" with an accused and abusing its discretion. It ordered the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, to go back to jail within two weeks.

The reasons for seeking extension of the deadline to surrender include failing health, impending surgery, son's marriage and harvesting ripe crops.

The matter was mentioned before a bench of Justices BV Nagarathana and Sanjay Karol which asked the registry to place their applications before Chief Justice DY Chandrachud.

Senior advocate V Chitambaresh, appearing for some of the convicts, mentioned the matter and sought its urgent listing on Friday since the deadline to surrender expires on 21 January.

The five convicts who have sought relief are Govind Nai, Pradeep Mordhiya, Bipin Chandra Joshi, Ramesh Chandana and Mitesh Bhatt.

"The respondent himself is an old man who is suffering from asthma and is in really poor health. It is further submitted that the respondent was recently operated upon and had to undergo an angiography. It is also submitted that the Respondent is yet to undergo another operation for the treatment of 'Hemorrhoids'," Nai said in his plea.In his plea seeking more time to surrender, Chandana said he was looking after his crops and that were ready for harvest. He said he is the only male member in the family and has to take care of the crops.Mordhiya submitted he requires regular consultation with doctors after he underwent a lung surgery.

Another convict Mitesh Bhatt said his winter crops are ready for harvest and he needs to complete the task before surrendering.

Joshi has cited a recent leg surgery to seek relief. *—PTI*

A local train runs on its tracks amid fog on a cold winter morning, in Kolkata on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

Fog cripples North; rail, air traffic impacted

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

A layer of fog lowered visibility to zero metres at several places in north and northeast India, affecting rail traffic, officials said.

Satellite imagery showed some reduction in fog over Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

However, 'dense' to 'very dense' fog prevailed in parts of Punjab, Haryana, west Rajasthan, Bihar, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Assam.

A spokesperson for the Indian Railways said 18 trains arriving in Delhi were delayed by up to six hours due to foggy weather. At the Palam Observatory near the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in Delhi, visibility was limited to only 50m.

Early-morning foggy weather in north and northeast India has heavily impacted road, rail and air traffic over the last fortnight.

The IMD said 'dense' to 'very dense' fog and 'cold day' to 'severe cold day' conditions are likely to prevail over north India for the next five days."Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely to continue over northwest India for five days," it said.

In the plains, the MeT office declares a 'cold wave' if the minimum temperature dips to 4 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

Delhi airport sees 4 flight diversions

New Delhi, 18 Jan

Four flights were diverted at the Delhi airport early morning on Thursday due to bad weather, according to an official. The official said two flights were diverted to Jaipur and one each to Hyderabad and Mumbai. The flight diversions happened during the period between 1.30am and 2.30 am. *—PTI*

14 flights cancelled in Ranchi

Ranchi, 18 Jan

As many as 14 flights were cancelled at the Birsa Munda Airport here on Thursday due to dense fog, an official said. For safe landing or take-off of a flight, a visibility of above 1,300m is required. In Ranchi, the visibility hovered around 50m.*—PTI.*

CABINET APPROVES CREATION OF 3 NEW POSTS FOR 16TH FIN COMM

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The Cabinet on Thursday approved the creation of three officer-level posts for assisting the 16th Finance Commission, chaired by Arvind Panagariya.

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the creation of three posts at the level of Joint Secretary i.e. two posts of Joint Secretary and one post of Economic Adviser.

In a notification dated 31 December, 2023, the government appointed former vice chairman of Niti Aayog Panagariya as the chairman of the 16th Finance Commission.

Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey was named as the Secretary to the Commission. *—PTI*

NEW RULES BY CENTRE

Coaching centres can't have students less than 16 years

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The guidelines have been framed to address the need for a legal framework and manage the uncontrolled private centres growth PHOTO: PTI

Coaching centres cannot enroll students below 16 years of age, make misleading promises and guarantee rank or good marks, according to new guidelines announced by the Ministry of Education.

The guidelines have been framed to address the need for a legal framework and manage the uncontrolled private coaching centres growth.

It comes following complaints received by the government about rising cases of student suicides, fire incidents, lack of facilities in coaching incidents as well as methodologies of teaching adopted by them.

"No coaching centre shall engage tutors having qualifications less than graduation. The institutions cannot make misleading promises or guarantee rank or good marks to parents for enrolling students in the coaching centres. The institutes cannot enrol students below 16 years of age. Student enrolment should be only after secondary school examination," the guidelines said.

"The coaching institutes cannot publish or cause to be published or take part in the publication of any misleading advertisement relating to any claim, directly or indirectly, of quality of coaching or the facilities offered therein or the result procured by such coaching centre or the student who attended such class," it added.

The coaching centres cannot hire the services of any tutor or person who has been convicted of any offence involving moral turpitude. An institute will not be registered unless it has a counselling system as per the requirement of these guidelines.

"Coaching centres shall have a website with updated details of the qualification of tutors, courses/curriculum, duration of completion, hostel facilities, and the fees being charged," the guidelines stated. *—PTI*

Eyewitness identifies Yasin Malik as shooter

JAMMU, 18 JAN

Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Chief Yasin Malik lifted his 'pheran', pulled out his gun and opened fire at a group of IAF personnel, an eyewitness deposed before CBI court on Thursday. He was narrating what happened in Srinagar on 25 January, 1990.

Former IAF corporal Rajwar Umeshwar Singh, who survived the terror attack in which four IAF personnel were killed, pointed to Malik in the courtroom as the main shooter. Malik attended the court proceedings on video from Tihar Jail where he has been incarcerated since 2019.

Besides the four men, including squadron leader Ravi Khanna, who were killed, 40 people were injured on 25 January, 1990, in Rawalpora on the outskirts of Srinagar. The IAF employees were waiting for their pickup to old Srinagar airfield for duty when they came under fire from terrorists.

A chargesheet was filed on 31 August, 1990 against Malik and five others before the designated TADA Court at Jammu.

Besides Malik, others accused in the killing of the IAF personnel are JKLF operatives Ali Mohammed Mir, Manzoor Ahmed Sofi alias Mustafa, Javed Ahmed Mir alias 'Nalka', Showkat Ahmed Bakshi, Javed Ahmed Zargar and Nanaji.

"This is an important development in the case... the prosecution witness has identified Malik as the man behind the shooting," said Senior Public Prosecutor for CBI Monika Kohli. *—PTI*

TAMIL NADU HILL DISTRICTS SHIVER WITH UNSEASONAL COLD

NILGIRIS, 18 JAN

Plummeting temperature in this hill district has left people grappling with biting cold in what seems to be an unseasonal climatic phenomenon that has also affected farming.

The lush green lawns are covered with frost and dense fog has affected visibility, as locals struggle with health issues due to the dipping mercury.

Such cold, dry spell is usually witnessed during November-December, locals said. In many places, people were seen trying to keep themselves warm by sitting around bonfire.

According to official data available, temperature was recorded at 1 degree celcius at Kanthal and Thalaikuntha in Udhagamandalam while the mercury was a notch higher at 2 degree celcius in Botanical Garden. Sandynallah was warmer at 3 degree celcius. Residents and environmental activists are worried over the relatively 'unseasonal' cold that has gripped the mountains. *—PTI*

'Air passengers to reach 300M by 2030'

HYDERABAD, 18 JAN

The number of domestic air passengers in India is expected to surge to 300 million annually by 2030 from 153 million in 2023 and the country still would have a vast untapped market, Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Thursday.

He said the number of airports and waterdromes will increase to over 200 from the existing 149 in the country.

With 300 million passengers a year in 2030, India's aviation penetration would be at 10-15 per cent and still be a potential market in the decades to come.

"We will still be one of the most under-penetrated markets across the top 20 in the world. Today our penetration is roughly about 3 to 4 per cent that will grow to about 10 to 15 per cent. We still have 85 per cent penetration to go," he said.

He noted that the domestic air passenger traffic witnessed 15 per cent growth (CAGR) while international air passenger traffic was 6.1 per cent, in the last decade.According to Scindia, India today is the third largest domestic civil aviation market in the world and the seventh largest international civil aviation market in the world. If both domestic and international are combined, then India is the fifth largest civil aviation market in the world.In the last 15 years, domestic and international cargo witnessed a growth of 60 and 53 per cent respectively.On the fleet size in the country, Scindia said it has grown from 400 to over 700. "Today, India has become the largest purchaser of aircraft in the world." *—PTI*

MISSING FOR 34 DAYS

Man's suicide note helps cops find murdered lover

THANE, 18 JAN

The probe revealed she was killed by her jilted lover who committed suicide by jumping in front of a local train PHOTO: PTI

A 19-year-old woman who had been missing for the last 34 days was found murdered in Kharghar area of Navi Mumbai. The probe revealed she was killed by her jilted lover who committed suicide by jumping in front of a local train, the police have said.The man had left behind a "code" in a suicide note that was retrieved from his mobile phone. After toiling for days, investigators decoded it, which was the number of a tree marked by forest officials. The code helped the cops trace the woman's body.

The woman was allegedly strangled to death in Kharghar hills by the accused who was angry over her snapping ties with him, an official said.

The woman left for her college in Sion on 12 December and never returned, following which a missing person case was registered.

During the investigation, police received a message that one Vaibhav Burungale, a resident of Kalamnboli, had killed himself by jumping in front of a running local train at Juinagar railway station on 12 December.

- The woman was allegedly strangled to death in Kharghar hills by the accused who was angry over her snapping ties with him

Meanwhile, Navi Mumbai Police Commissioner Milind Bharambe set up a special task force to investigate the case.

Police found a suicide note saved in the mobile phone of Burungale stating that he had murdered the woman and was going to commit suicide, the official said.

The official said code words such as 'L01-501' were used in the suicide note which was decoded by the police to crack the case. The code was the number of a tree, marked by the Forest Department, where Burungale dumped the body of the woman.

The breakthrough came when the woman's body was spotted lying in bushes in a dumping ground in the Owe camp area in Kharghar, it said.

The body was identified based on the dress the woman was wearing when she had left for college, the wristwatch, and the ID card.

Further investigation is underway, police said.*—PTI*

DEAD NOT SPARED

Palestinians inspect damaged graves following an Israeli tank raid over a cemetery in Khan Younis refugee camp, southern Gaza Strip, ***PHOTO: PTI***

Will Lakshadweep keep up with mass tourism?

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indian archipelago Lakshadweep triggered an unexpected row that soured ties with neighbouring Maldives. It also set off a surge in tourist interest in the small island chain that has worried ecological experts and many locals.

On his visit to Lakshadweep - a federally administered territory that lies in the Arabian Sea, to the north of Maldives - Modi had announced a slew of development projects and shared photos of himself snorkelling and enjoying its beaches.

Three Maldivian deputy ministers made derogatory comments about him, sparking outrage on Indian social media and prompting many to highlight Lakshadweep as an alternative tourist destination.

It seems to be working - Google searches for Lakshadweep, which doesn't often make it to primetime news, jumped to an all-time high last week. MakeMyTrip, India's largest online travel company, said it saw a 3,400 per cent increase in searches for Lakshadweep on its platform after Modi's trip.

Praful Patel, the region's government administrator whose controversial policies set off "unprecedented protests" from locals in Lakshadweep a couple of years ago, has welcomed the attention.

"The natural beauty of Lakshadweep carries immense possibilities for development of the tourism sector. The administration has launched several initiatives, including adding more rooms," he told news agency PTI.

The Tata Group has announced plans to open two "world-class" resorts on two Lakshadweep islands by 2026 (the archipelago has 36 islands - only 10 are inhabited - spread over 32 sq km (12.3 sq miles)). The only airline that currently flies to Lakshadweep has started additional flights and another plans to launch a service soon.

But experts say Lakshadweep - famed for its picturesque siver beaches, crystal-blue waters and coral islands - cannot be developed into a massive tourist destination like the Maldives because of its small size and fragile ecology.

Prime Minister Modi shared several photos from his Lakshadweep trip earlier this month ***PHOTO: @NARENDRAMODI/X***

Many locals also say that what they need is responsible tourism in which they are stakeholders, not large-scale development plans that will overturn their way of life.

"The main occupation of the people is fishing, coconut cultivation and coir twisting," according to a government website, which calls tourism "an emerging industry" here.

Until the launch of additional flights, there were only two ways to reach the archipelago - a 72-seater plane operated by Alliance Air that flew daily from Kochi in Kerala state to Lakshadweep's only airport on Agatti island, and ships from the mainland that arrived every four days.

Entry to Lakshadweep is also limited by permits issued by the administration.

"Transport, accommodation and land-based infrastructure are a huge bottleneck [to developing the islands]," says PP Mohammed Faizal from the Nationalist Congress Party, who is the only MP representing around 70,000 people in Lakshadweep.

"Bangaram, the island on which Prime Minister Modi stayed, has only 36 rooms [for tourists]," he says.

So, much of the territory's current tourism operates through cruises - visitors from ships docked off the archipelago tour the islands during the day and return to the vessel to spend the night.

In contrast, Maldives has hundreds of options for tourists to stay, including resorts, hotels and guesthouses.

"What Maldives has, Lakshadweep can offer by way of beaches, underwater and water sports activities. But infrastructure-wise, we have miles to travel," Faizal says.

He adds that for any development to take place, the differences between the administration and the islanders will need to be settled.

Maldives ultimatum on troops deepens row with India

96 percent of Lakshadweep's population is Muslim and the island has witnessed tensions after Patel - a former leader of Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party - was appointed its administrator in 2021.

He has since announced controversial measures including removing meat from school meal menus and a draft law that gives the administration sweeping powers to take over land.

In interviews, Patel has defended his administration's policies, saying his only agenda was the "development of Lakshadweep".

Althaf Hussain, who runs a travel agency on Agatti island, says enquiries from prospective tourists have gone up by 30-40 per cent since Modi's visit. *—BBC News*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Can school help improve mental health of pupils?

Recent data shows that around 20 per cent of children and young people aged from eight to 25 years have a probable mental disorder.

This is an increase from the 10 per cent recorded in 2017, when the UK government declared the prevalence of mental ill health in children and young people to be "one of the burning injustices of our time".

Lack of investment in mental health services, coupled with growing demand, has left many children and young people with limited or no support.

The effects are being felt in schools. Ofsted's 2023 annual report includes concern about the rising use of part-time timetables in schools – which can be for children struggling with their mental health. Part-time attendance may involve only attending school on specified days or daily attendance but with a reduction in the number of hours pupils spend in school.

Schools are operating with already stretched resources. But they are an obvious route to supporting children's mental health. Children and young people spend a significant proportion of their time in schools.

With the proper resources to help, schools could offer swift support – especially when many children and young people experience delays in accessing external support, particularly from child and adolescent mental health services.A key way that schools could support children's mental health is the introduction of a mental health curriculum. This would aim to develop pupils' mental health literacy by developing their knowledge of mental health issues and introducing them to strategies to manage their own mental health.

Dedication to mental health

My own research with colleagues explored the impact of a mental health curriculum delivered by a sports community trust and school partnership, with 570 young people in schools across Cambridge.The curriculum included sessions on stress, resilience, social media use and self-management strategies. A mental health curriculum was designed and delivered by sports coaches who were employed by the community trust and trained in mental health to students in secondary schools. Footballers from the local football club contributed by sharing their own lived experiences of mental ill-health. Not only did students' knowledge of mental health improve, but they also gained knowledge of strategies to help themselves cope with adversity and how to help others with mental ill health. Another strand of the whole school approach relates to working in partnership with children and young people to improve mental health. We conducted another study in which older students acted as mentors in secondary schools.

They designed and delivered weekly physical activity sessions to younger students with social, emotional and mental health needs.We found that this improved levels of physical activity, which supported children's mental health. The younger students gained coping skills and the programme also helped with their social skills, by leading to the development of supportive and trusting relationships between mentors and the students they were supporting.

Both studies illustrate that schools can play a role in supporting children and young people's mental health – but that they require help and funding to do so.

Space and time

Nurture groups are used in some schools to support children with social, emotional and mental health needs. They can take place in nurture rooms, which tend to be more informal spaces than standard classrooms and provide positive environments for children to develop social and emotional literacy and regulation skills.Nurture groups focus on helping children with their confidence, self-esteem and communication and with establishing positive relationships with others.

These skills are explicitly taught and children have opportunities to practise the skills they learn.A research study involving 384 children aged five and six demonstrated improvements in social, emotional and behavioural outcomes, although there was no evidence that nurture groups led to improvements in academic outcomes. Mindfulness is another practice that can take place in schools. The aim of mindfulness, as a practice, is to focus attention on the present rather than the past or the future, through guided participation. This could include focusing on breathing or a specific part of the body. However, it is important to remember that teachers are not mental health therapists. There are professional boundaries that apply to what they can and cannot do. *—Courtesy, The Conversation*

With the proper resources to help, schools could offer swift support – especially when many children and young people experience delays in accessing external support ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Pakistan election: How votes of rural women can make a difference

Pakistan is heading for an election in February, with women accounting for just 58.5 million of the country's 127 million registered voters.

Women are less likely to register and fewer women than men turn up at the polls, even in big cities such as Lahore or Karachi.

"I never voted in last four general elections, and I'm still not interested in casting my ballot," Karachi-based university graduate Saadia Qamar said about the election scheduled for 8 February.

Qamar is a former diplomat and a writer. She said she is disillusioned by the differences between her liberal worldview and the reality of Pakistani politics.

Women voters show up in force in rural areas

In developing countries, literacy and a higher standard of living are often listed as factors that motivate women to take a larger role in political life.

However, in Pakistan's 2018 general election, the five constituencies with the highest number of female voter turnout were all located in remote rural areas with lower living standards.

The average turnout was just over 51.7 per cent, and close to 46.7 per cent for female voters in 2018.

But in the two constituencies of the desert region of Tharparkar, female turnout was way more impressive, notching over 72.8 per cent in one and close 71.5 per cent in the other.

In both of those constituencies, the turnout was lower among men, with 65.4 per cent in the first and around 70.5 per cent in the second.

Tharparkar is a border area of Pakistan's Sindh province with a sizeable Hindu population in a Muslim-majority country.

It is considered underdeveloped even with regards to basic necessities such as potable water, electricity, schools, the health-care system and the road network. However, the area is rich in coal reserves, and the government has been taking steps to mine the resource.

Elections as a tool to secure food, jobs

Tharparkar resident and activist Pushpa Kumari told DW that economic troubles play a part in motivating female voters.

"The women of this remote region of Thar are not economically privileged as compared to the women from cities, and they develop hope after every five years to bring even the slightest of change in their lives by participating in the political system," she said.

The 49-year-old added that voting in this region is based more on winning over communities, making it easier for political candidates to consolidate votes from the entire village.

"There are also some women who trade their votes with candidates in return for basic necessities like food, for a bag or two of flour, or guarantee of a public job," Kumari said, adding that poverty forces people to find ways to meet their basic needs.

Women are once again looking forward to the upcoming general elections in February, as they have no other choice to get involved and improve their livelihoods, according to Kumari.

Besides the two Tharparkar constituencies in the Sindh province, the remaining three areas with the highest female voting turnout rations are in rural remote parts of Punjab.

Women are less likely to register and fewer women than men turn up at the polls, even in big cities such as Lahore or Karachi. However, they are once again looking forward to the upcoming general elections in February, as they have no other choice to get involved and improve their livelihoods ***PHOTOS: REUTERS, AFP***

- In developing countries, literacy and a higher standard of living are often listed as factors that motivate women to take a larger role in political life

Politicians have more work ahead

Taj Haider, a senior politician from center-left Pakistan's People's Party, said that women in remote areas have became more conscious of politics and have more to bargain with.

"The interest of rural women in electoral system in Pakistan is unprecedented," he said.According to Haider, the driving factors for political mobilisation are poverty and the desire for change, rather than education or higher social status.Mainstream Pakistani political parties are focusing on core issues that matter to rural women, Haider said.These issues include improving social safety programs and the country's health-care system, but he warns that enormous work is yet to be done in rural areas. *—Courtesy, DW News*

Drought at Panama Canal disrupts global trade

PANAMA CITY, 18 JAN

A severe drought that began last year has forced authorities to slash ship crossings by 36 per cent in the Panama Canal, one of the world's most important trade routes. The new cuts announced Wednesday by authorities in Panama are set to deal an even greater economic blow than previously expected. Canal administrators now estimate that dipping water levels could cost them between USD 500 million and USD 700 million in 2024, compared to previous estimates of USD 200 million. One of the most severe droughts to ever hit the Central American nation has stirred chaos in the 50-mile maritime route, causing a traffic jam of boats, casting doubts on the canal's reliability for international shipping and raising concerns about its affect on global trade. *—AP*

PHOTO: X

King Charles III seeks treatment for enlarged prostate

LONDON, 18 JAN

Britain's King Charles III will visit a hospital next week for a procedure to treat his enlarged prostate, the Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday, CBS News reported. The Buckingham Palace said in a statement: "In common with thousands of men each year, The King has sought treatment for an enlarged prostate. His Majesty's condition is benign and he will attend the hospital next week for a corrective procedure. The King's public engagements will be postponed for a short period of recuperation." King Charles was crowned last year at the age of 74 after inheriting the monarchy upon the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II. His health is generally understood to have been good. In 2008, he had a non-cancerous growth removed from his face. *—ANI*

Bali 'suitcase murderer' gets 26 years in jail

BALI, 18 JAN

An American woman who helped kill her mother and stuff her body in a suitcase during a 2014 holiday in Bali has been sentenced to 26 years in prison. Heather Mack was convicted in Indonesia in 2015 and sentenced to 10 years in prison, but was released in 2021. She was then arrested upon arriving in the US and charged with conspiracy to kill a US national. Mack has spent the last two years in a Chicago prison as she awaited sentencing. On Wednesday, Judge Matthew Kennelly ruled that Mack, 28, will receive credit for the time she has served thus far, reducing her formal sentence to around 23 years. Prosecutors had recommended a 28-year prison sentence for Mack, who conspired with her then-boyfriend Tommy Schaefer to kill her mother, wealthy academic Sheila von Wiese-Mack.*—BBC News*

US upholds ban on sale of latest Apple watches

NEW YORK, 18 JAN

Apple has once again been banned from selling two smartwatch models in the US, while a legal battle continues over a patent dispute. The tech giant was earlier allowed to sell its Series 9 and Ultra 2 watches while proceedings were ongoing - but a US appeals court has since reversed that decision. Imports of watches are also affected. On Thursday, Apple said it will release watches without the disputed blood oxygen feature to keep them on shelves. It is the latest turn in a dispute between the firm and medical technology company Masimo. Masimo and spin-off Cercacor have accused the iPhone maker of poaching key staff and taking other steps to steal technology it developed to measure oxygen levels in the blood. *—BBC News*

Pak launches retaliatory strikes into Iran, 9 killed

Foreign office said a number of terrorists were killed during operations

ISLAMABAD, 18 JAN

Pakistan on Thursday conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Siestan-Balochistan province that killed nine people, a day after Islamabad recalled its ambassador from Tehran and suspended all planned high-level bilateral visits following Iranian missile and drone attacks in Balochistan.

"This morning Pakistan undertook a series of highly coordinated and specifically targeted precision military strikes against terrorist hideouts in Siestan-o-Baluchistan province of Iran," the Foreign Office said in a statement on Thursday morning. It said a number of terrorists were killed during the intelligence-based operation codenamed "Marg Bar Sarmachar".

Citing a senior official, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported that 3 women and 4 children all non-Iranian nationals - were killed in the missile attack launched by Pakistan on a border village. The attack which occurred at 04:05 hours local time (0335 GMT) targeted an Iranian border village, Ali Reza Marhamati, the deputy governor-general of the province was quoted as saying by the news agency.

There was also an explosion near Saravan city, 347 km southeast of the provincial capital Zahedan, where there were no casualties, he added. Quoting an informed source, state-run Press TV reported that Iran has demanded Pakistan's "immediate explanation" about the incident.

Iran's attack and Pakistan's retaliatory strikes have raised tensions in the volatile region, already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the targeting of the merchant ships in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthis. In its statement, the Foreign Office said that Pakistan has consistently shared its serious concerns with Iran about the safe havens and sanctuaries enjoyed by Pakistani origin terrorists calling themselves Sarmachars on the ungoverned spaces inside Iran. "However, because of lack of action on our serious concerns, these so-called Sarmachars continued to spill the blood of innocent Pakistanis with impunity. This morning's action was taken in light of credible intelligence of impending large-scale terrorist activities by these so-called Sarmachars," it added.

Sources in Pakistan said that shortly before 0600 hours (local time) today, the Joint Staff Headquarters of the Pakistan Armed Forces ordered lethal counterinsurgency-specific precision airstrikes inside Iran, pre-authorised by the Government of Pakistan, to preemptively target and eliminate imminent terrorist threats to Pakistan.

"These strikes were conducted successfully using Pakistan Air Force fighter jets using stand-off extended range munitions, while they remained inside Pakistani airspace," a source said. *—PTI*

Members of Muslim Talba Mahaz Pakistan chant slogans at a demonstration to condemn Iran strike in the Pakistani border area, in Islamabad, Pakistan **PHOTO: AP**

Arrangements in place for peaceful polls: Pak

ISLAMABAD, 18 JAN

Pakistan's top government and security officials have assured the poll body of their readiness to hold general elections on February 8 amid threats posed by the militants in various parts of the country.

Senior officials in a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja to review the preparations for the polls assured that all arrangements were in place to hold elections and deal with "any kind of situation".

Raja emphasised that the safety and security of candidates and voters must be ensured and a conducive environment for the elections be created so that citizens could exercise their right to vote without fear, Dawn News reported.

Despite threat alerts in certain areas, the officials, including chief secretaries and inspectors general of the four provinces, Islamabad's chief commissioner, members and secretary of the Election Commission, and representatives of other law enforcement agencies, pledged unwavering commitment to peaceful elections.

The officials highlighted the installation of CCTV cameras at sensitive polling stations and the timely supply of funds to relevant agencies.

Raja directed that the security of political leaders and voters be prioritised, with strict adherence to the election code of conduct. Troubled Balochistan's chief secretary discussed the formation of peace committees at polling stations, while Punjab's chief secretary called for clear policy instructions concerning changes in the allotment of election symbols to avoid delays. *—PTI*

'Innocent': Indian-origin Singapore min resigns

SINGAPORE, 18 JAN

Singapore's Indian-origin former transport minister S Iswaran, who has resigned from the ruling party after being charged with multiple offences, on Thursday said he was "innocent" and rejected all graft allegations against him.

Earlier in the day, Iswaran, 61, was handed an array of charges, the bulk of which was for receiving items worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from billionaire hotelier Ong Beng Seng, mainly relating to the Singapore F1 race, The Straits Times newspaper reported.

He pleaded not guilty to 27 charges - two of corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act, one of obstructing justice and 24 of receiving gratification as a public servant under the Penal Code. He told the court he intends to claim trial.

"I am innocent and will now focus on clearing my name," the former minister said in a statement on Thursday, rejecting all allegations against him.

Iswaran, who earlier in the day, resigned from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and announced stepping down as a Member of Parliament, said that he did that "even without being asked to do so".

"I resigned as Cabinet Minister, Member of Parliament and as a member of the People's Action Party because I believe it was the right thing to do," Iswaran was quoted as saying by Channel News Asia.

In his resignation letter to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, dated 16 January, Iswaran rejected the various offences the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) charged him with. "I reject the allegations in the charges and will now focus on clearing my name. Given the circumstances, I feel it is right for me to resign from Cabinet, as a Member of Parliament and as a member of the PAP," the letter said. *—PTI*

S Iswaran **PHOTO: PTI**

At least 22 people killed at Thailand fireworks factory

BANGKOK, 18 JAN

At least 22 people were killed in an explosion at a Suphan Buri fireworks factory in Thailand on Wednesday, Bangkok Post reported. About 10 people are said to be missing.

The explosion took place at village Moo 3 in Tambon Salakhao of Muang district in Thailand at around 3:30 pm (local time). So far, 20 deceased people have been identified. The debris due to the force of the explosion, spread over a radius of 100 metres, with human remains scattered everywhere, according to the report.

According to residents, about 20 workers had arrived to work at the factory in the morning and added that they witnessed nobody come out after the explosion.

The factory owner was not among the dead as he had gone out to deliver fireworks to customers at the time of the explosion, according to the Deputy Chairman of Tambon Salakhao Municipality, Thongsuk Suenui, Bangkok Post reported.

Rescue workers on a cite of an explosion at a firework factory in Suphan Buri province in Thiland **PHOTO: AP**

The factory was operating out of a farmhouse where gunpowder and other raw materials for fireworks were stored. Authorities are investigating the cause of the blast. Thailand Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin was briefed on the explosion. Thavisin, who is currently attending the World Economic Forum in Switzerland's Davos, called for a swift investigation. Srettha Thavisin's office said, "The prime minister ordered an inspection of the plant to see if it was operating legally and if the explosion was caused by negligence. The law must be enforced to the fullest extent because there are innocent deaths and injuries," Bangkok Post reported.

Local officials said the 20 people confirmed as dead included 12 women and 8 men.

According to records, 24 explosions took place at fireworks factories and warehouses in Thailand over the past 15 years between 2008 and 2023, with each incident causing extensive damage, including deaths and injuries. *—ANI*

NEARLY 2 YEARS OF INVASION

West still seeking a way to steer frozen Russian assets

WASHINGTON, 18 JAN

It's been nearly two years since the United States and its allies froze hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian foreign holdings in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

That roughly $300 billion in Russian Central Bank money has been sitting untapped as the war grinds on, while officials from multiple countries have debated the legality of sending the money to Ukraine. The idea of using Russia's frozen assets is gaining new traction lately as continued allied funding for Ukraine becomes more uncertain and the US Congress is in a stalemate over providing more support. But there are tradeoffs since the weaponisation of global finance could harm the US dollar's standing as the world's dominant currency.

At this week's World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, Switzerland, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for a "strong" decision this year for the frozen assets in Western banks to "be directed towards defense against the Russian war and for reconstruction" of Ukraine.

"Putin loves money above all," he said. "The more billions he and his oligarchs, friends and accomplices lose, the more likely he will regret starting this war."

Biden administration officials who previously dismissed the idea as legally cumbersome are showing growing openness to the idea.

Penny Pritzker, the US special representative for Ukraine's economic recovery, said at the Davos forum that the US and Group of Seven allies are still looking for an adequate legal framework to pursue the plan. *—AP*

roughly $300 billion in Russian Central Bank money has been sitting untapped as the war grinds on **PHOTO: AP/PTI**

IN YEMEN

US launches 4th strike on Houthis

WASHINGTON, 18 JAN

- The strikes - supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada and Netherlands- began after Houthi forces ignored an ultimatum to cease their attacks in the region

The US has carried out a fourth round of strikes on Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen, Pentagon officials confirmed on Wednesday night.

Some 14 Houthi missiles, which the US says may have been intended for attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, were targeted by American forces. Centcom - the US Middle East command - said the sites were struck by Tomahawk missiles fired from US Navy vessels.

The strikes come as the US designated the Houthis as "global terrorists". US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the move, which reversed a decision to remove the designation in the early days of the Biden administration, was in response to the militants' ongoing attacks on commercial shipping in the region.

The Houthis began attacking merchant vessels in November, saying they were responding to Israel's military operation in Gaza. Since then, the group has launched dozens of attacks on commercial tankers passing through the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. In response, the US and UK launched a wave of air strikes against dozens of Houthi targets on 11 January.

The strikes - supported by Australia, Bahrain, the Netherlands and Canada - began after Houthi forces ignored an ultimatum to cease their attacks in the region.

Wednesday's strikes on Houthi targets followed further attacks on commercial shipping. Hours earlier, the group struck a US owned and operated vessel for the second time this week. The rebels used a one-way drone to target the M/V Genco Picardy in the Gulf of Aden, Centcom said. The ship suffered some damage, but no crew members were injured in the attack. *—BBC News*

Judge threatens to kick Trump out of defamation trial

WSHINGTON, 18 JAN

Donald Trump's lawyers accused E Jean Carroll of courting publicity on Wednesday, as she said her reputation was left "shattered" after accusing him of sexual assault in the 1990s.

The second day of the civil defamation trial featured several fiery exchanges. At one point, the judge threatened to kick Trump out of court after he was overheard criticising her testimony.

A jury found Trump liable for sexually abusing Ms Carroll last year, but he continues to deny the claim. He was found liable for sexual abuse and defamation, though not for rape, and Ms Carroll was awarded $5m. That trial was based on his 2022 remarks that her story was a "con job" and a "hoax".

Donald Trump **PHOTO: PTI**

The current case focuses on different remarks - which the judge has already ruled were defamatory - that Trump made while he was president in 2019, when he called her allegation "totally false". This second trial will determine additional damages.

But much of Wednesday's proceedings were marked by angry exchanges between Trump and the judge, who threatened to revoke the former president's right to attend trial after a lawyer for Carroll heard him call the case a "witch hunt" and criticise his accuser's memory within earshot of the jury.

"Trump has a right to be present here," Judge Kaplan said, frustration evident in his voice.

"That right can be forfeited and it can be forfeited if he is disruptive, which is what has been reported to me, and if he disregards court orders." *—BBC News*

IN AFGHANISTAN

Will establish thousands of edu classes: UNICEF

KABUL, 18 JAN

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has declared that it will shortly open approximately a thousand educational classes in Afghanistan, Khaama Press reported.

The initiative, which was unveiled on Wednesday, 17 January, is to give some 1,40,000 Afghanistan's youngsters access to educational opportunities, at a time when the nation is battling its worst humanitarian crisis under the Taliban rule.

The organisation claims that these instructional programmes will foster learning, inspiration, and the construction of a better future.

Additionally, UNICEF has announced that it intends to establish 950 educational classes in Afghanistan using funding from South Korea.

This declaration is made at a time when girls in Afghanistan are prohibited from continuing their education past the sixth grade due to the Taliban regime's control of the country, reported Khaama Press.

Due to Taliban-imposed limitations, more than a million Afghan girls are unable to attend school or receive an education.

In addition, almost 100,000 female school teachers have lost their jobs, and thousands of women and girls are not being given the chance to pursue further education. These restrictions have negatively impacted Afghan women's and girls' rights to an education, Khaama Press reported.

This declaration is made at a time when girls are prohibited from continuing their education past the sixth grade **PHOTO: ANI**

Despite the Taliban's initial promise to take a moderate approach towards women's rights after it seized power in August 2021, the ban on higher education is just one of many steps that the armed group has taken to further segregate the country and limit women's role in society.

In the immediate aftermath of August 2021, the Taliban banned girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade and imposed strict rules requiring women to wear hijabs and to travel only with a male chaperone.

They closed down beauty salons and blocked women from working with domestic and international non-governmental aid groups, sparking international outrage on the matter. *—ANI*

- The initiative, which was unveiled on Wednesday, 17 January, is to give some 1,40,000 Afghanistan's youngsters access to educational opportunities, at a time when the nation is battling its worst humanitarian crisis under the Taliban rule

Rupee rises 2 paise to 83.12 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

The rupee appreciated 2 paise to settle at 83.12 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking a weak American currency against major rivals overseas.A weak trend in domestic equity markets and rising crude oil prices kept the movement of the domestic currency restrcited, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.16 and traded in the range of 83.10 to 83.18 against the greenback. The unit finally settled at 83.12 against the dollar, registering a gain of 2 paise over its previous close.On Wednesday, the rupee settled 2 paise lower at 83.14 against the US dollar.Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.15 per cent lower at 103.05 on Thursday.Analysts said the dollar retreated after the US data released on Wednesday showed increased retail sales in the country, reflecting sustained economic growth and dashing the financial market's hope of an interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve. *—PTI*

Gold slumps ₹300; silver slips ₹200

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Gold prices slumped Rs 300 to Rs 62,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a decline globally, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous trade, the yellow metal finished at Rs 63,050 per 10 grams.Silver also slipped Rs 200 to Rs 75,600 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 75,800 per kg in the previous close. In the international markets, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,010 per ounce and USD 22.57 per ounce, respectively.Gold extended its losses amid upbeat US retail sales data, indicating that American economy remains robust and reduces the possibility of an interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve.*—PTI*

Interest rates to keep falling but last mile tricky: IMF Chief

DAVOS, 18 JAN

IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva on Thursday said interest rates should keep falling in 2024 but cautioned that there is no room for any policy error as the last mile is "very, very tricky".In an interview with the World Economic Forum here during its Annual Meeting 2024, she said that the central banks should not tighten prematurely because then they may lose the victory that is now in their hands.Expecting the positive trend to continue in 2024, she said, "The inflation rate is going down, on average." The International Monetary Fund's Managing Director, however, flagged the regional discrepancies still persisting aroundShe called on policymakers in various countries to continue exercising caution, and to focus on the data."The US has a very tight labour market and wages are now going above inflation. What does that mean? People have more money to spend. And when they spend more, that puts pressure on prices upwards. So that last mile is very, very tricky," she said.*—PTI*

M'rashtra inks MoUs worth ₹3.53Lcr at WEF in Davos

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister EknathShinde has said that the state has inked memorandums of undertaking (MoUs) worth Rs 3,53,675 crore at the World Economic Forum 2024 in Davos, Switzerland.Shinde thanked investors, noting the increased confidence of global industries that showed interest in investing Rs 1 lakh crore in Maharashtra. These MoUs have the potential to create more than 2 lakh jobs.He said the state's image has been spotlighted as people-oriented with a strong emphasis on industrialisation, skilled manpower, and quick decision-making, the statement said.*—PTI*

Markets fall for 3rd day on profit-taking, HDFC major drag

BSE Sensex fell by 313.90 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 71,186.86

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty fell for the third day running on Thursday, dragged by continuous selling in HDFC Bank and profit-taking in consumer durables and utility shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 313.90 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 71,186.86. During the day, it tanked 835.26 points or 1.16 per cent to 70,665.50.

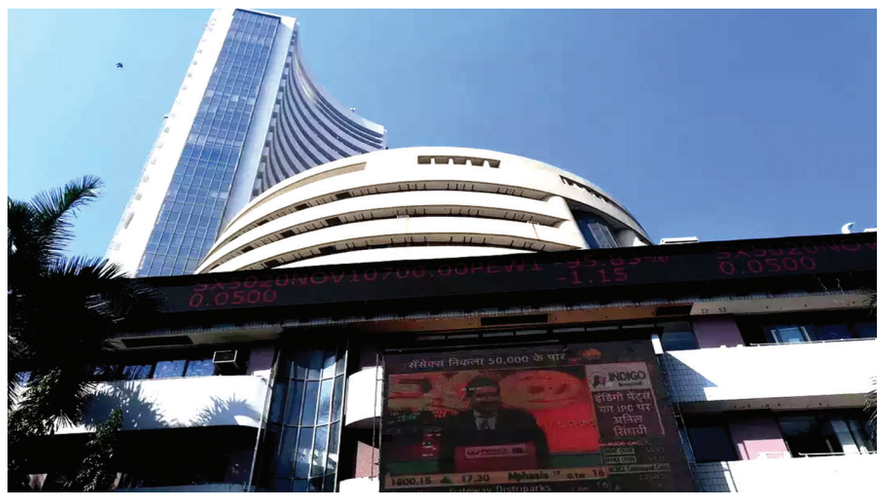
The Nifty declined 109.70 points or 0.51 per cent to 21,462.25. During the day, it plunged 286.4 points or 1.32 per cent to 21,285.55.

The heavy fall in the markets comes on the back of a recent record-breaking rally. The BSE benchmark hit an all-time high of 73,427.59 on Tuesday, and the Nifty also reached its lifetime peak of 22,124.15 the same day.

Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank, NTPC, Asian Paints, Power Grid, Titan, IndusInd Bank, Nestle and Maruti were the major laggards.

HDFC Bank fell over 3 per cent, extending its previous days' huge fall, after the company's December quarter earnings failed to impress investors. The private lender alone contributed 305 points to the fall.

Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank and Larsen & Toubro were among the gainers.



Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank, NTPC, Asian Paints, Power Grid, Titan, IndusInd Bank, Nestle and Maruti were the major laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled lower while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 10,578.13 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

On Wednesday, the BSE benchmark plunged 1,628.01 points, or 2.23 per cent, to settle at 71,500.76. The Nifty tanked 460.35 points or 2.09 per cent to settle at 21,571.95.

- HDFC Bank fell over 3 per cent, extending its previous days' huge fall, after the company's December quarter earnings failed to impress investors. The private lender alone contributed 305 points to the fall

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.50 per cent to USD. 78.27 a barrel.

—PTI

HDFC Bank shares fall over 11% in 2 days; mcap erodes by ₹1.45L crore

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Shares of HDFC Bank extended their previous day's decline, falling more than 11 per cent in two days, after the company's December quarter earnings failed to impress investors.

The stock fell by 3.26 per cent to settle at Rs 1,486.80 apiece on the BSE on Thursday. During the day, it lost 3.70 per cent to Rs 1,480.

On the NSE, it declined 3 per cent to Rs 1,490.

In two days, the stock has slumped 11.44 per cent. During this time, the company's market capitalisation (mcap) eroded by Rs 1,45,889.59 crore. Its market valuation stood at Rs 11,28,850.63 crore on Thursday.

The stock was the biggest drag among the 30-share BSE Sensex firms.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell 313.90 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 71,186.86, and the Nifty declined 109.70 points or 0.51 per cent to 21,462.25.

Shares of HDFC Bank fell by over 8 per cent on Wednesday.

HDFC Bank on Tuesday reported a 2.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit of Rs 17,258 crore for the October-December period against Rs 16,811 crore in the preceding September quarter.

—PTI

Indian Rlys to collaborate with Swiss railway: Minister

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Indian Railways plans to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Swiss railway to learn from some of their best practices and procedures including the hub and spoke model and tunnelling technology, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday.

He said there are many good things that can be learned and there are some conventional technologies also where we can learn by collaborating with Switzerland.

Vaishnaw further said Switzerland has a good system of track technology, especially the structure of tracks they have is very interesting.

"The most important thing I saw is that their entire network is based on a hub and spoke design. For example, if Zurich is a hub, then several trains arrive at Zurich station at one particular time, so that people can easily change over to any other train and then after the changeover, several trains leave the station around the same time," he noted.

"In our system, the focus has always been to provide end-to-end connectivity, for example, from Bhagalpur to Bengaluru or from Kolkata to Chennai or Delhi. Here in Switzerland, I saw that their network is not about end-to-end planning, but its focussed on hub and spoke model.

"They have six hubs and all of them have many connecting spokes. Trains arrive together at all six hubs and depart together. Their focus is more on changeovers," he said.

There are some good things to learn and we are doing a memorandum of understanding with Swiss railway so that things improve further in our own system. The minister said Switzerland also has a very good inter-connectivity between different modes of public transport. *—PTI*

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw *PHOTO: PTI*

Sheryl Sandberg to step down from Meta board

CALIFORNIA, 18 JAN

Sheryl Sandberg *PHOTO: X*

The former chief operating officer of Meta, Sheryl Sandberg, is leaving the company's board of directors. Sandberg, one of the most high-profile women in the tech industry, said that "this feels like the right time to step away" as Meta is "well-positioned for the future".She will serve as an informal advisor to the company going forward.Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg thanked her for the "extraordinary contributions" to the company.Sandberg, 54, joined the firm when it was a small start-up named Facebook. A veteran of Google, she helped turn its advertising business into a profit powerhouse, as the company grew to include Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger.The company also faced massive criticism under her watch, including misinformation during the 2016 election, the Cambridge Analytica privacy scandal in 2018, and the Capitol riot in 2021. She said that serving as Facebook and Meta's COO for over 14 years and a board member for 12 years was "the opportunity of a lifetime". Meta is facing new challenges as countries tighten social media regulations and iPhone maker Apple changes its privacy rules, hitting the social media firm's targeted ad business.

—BBC NEWS

UP GOVT RAISES SUGARCANE PRICES; FARMERS UNION CALLS IT 'INSUFFICIENT'

LUCKNOW, 18 JAN

Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday increased the state-advised price (SAP) for sugarcane by Rs 20 per quintal, in an effort to garner the support of farmers ahead of general elections.

BhartiyaKisan Union (BKU) termed the cane price hike insufficient. BKU National president Naresh Tikait said that the new sugarcane price is not acceptable for farmers and is insufficient as the cost of produce has increased in the state. *—PTI*

Turn cars into EV for incentives

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Government may look for providing incentives or supporting initiatives to retrofit old vehicles into electric vehicles instead of scrapping them, a report said on Thursday.

According to the joint report by management consultancy firm Primus Partners and ETB (European Business and Technology Centre), transitioning the internal combustion engine-powered vehicles to electric vehicles through retrofitting presents a spectrum of challenges.However, with a coordinated approach involving government initiatives, industry collaboration, and public engagement, these challenges can be addressed and overcome, it said."Instead of scrapping old vehicles, the government could provide incentives or support initiatives to retrofit old vehicles to run on electric power. The lifespan of existing vehicles is extended," report said. *—PTI*

Tea Board asks to limit generation of tea waste

KOLKATA, 18 JAN

Tea Board has mandated all producers to limit generation of tea waste not exceeding 0.2 per cent of production for maintaining the quality of produce.

A circular issued by the Board had stated that as per the Tea (Waste) Control Order of 1959, the minimum volume of tea waste and manufactured tea should be in the ratio of 2:100, which is two per cent of production.

However, this provision of the order had been challenged by certain stakeholders in the court and the minimum percentage of tea waste has been decided to be at 0.2 per cent and not two per cent, the circular said.

According to the board, this will enable the Indian tea producers to achieve high quality matching international standards.

Recently, Indian exporters faced problems and faced rejection of their export consignments on grounds of inferior quality.

Presently, tea waste is being used as raw material for producing instant tea, bio-fertiliser and caffeine. *—PTI*

₹5,607cr investments in two thermal projects

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs(CCEA) on Thursday approved equity investments of Rs 5,607 crore by state-owned South Eastern Coalfields and Mahanadi Coalfields to set up two thermal power projects with total generation capacities of 2,260 MW.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the CCEA chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, an official statement said.

According to the statement, South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL) will set up a 660 MW thermal power plant through a joint venture of SECL and MPPGCL.

Similarly, Manadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) will set up a 2x800 MW thermal power plant through Mahanadi Basin Power Ltd (MBPL - a subsidiary of MCL). *—PTI*

THRIVING FINTECHS

Fintechs are increasingly expanding operations across borders, mainly in the same region as their headquarters *PHOTO: PTI*

India among most vibrant fintech hubs: WEF Study

DAVOS, 18 JAN

India is among the most significant operating countries for hosting a thriving cluster or fintech headquarters, a WEF study showed on Thursday.

Releasing the report during its Annual Meeting 2024 here, the World Economic Forum said fintechs are increasingly expanding operations across borders, mainly in the same region as their headquarters.

"The study reveals that vibrant hubs such as Singapore, the UK, the US, and India have hosted a thriving cluster of fintech corporate headquarters.

"Among the countries surveyed, the most significant operating countries for fintechs include the US, the UK, Singapore, Mexico, and India," it added.

Consumer demand is the main driver of growth, and fintechs are offering tailored financial services and products to traditionally underserved segments of the population, it noted.

The report said the global fintech industry is demonstrating strength and resilience and continues, despite an unclear economic outlook, to expand financial services offerings to traditionally underserved consumers and businesses.

'The Future of Global Fintech: Towards Resilient and Inclusive Growth', developed in collaboration with the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance (CCAF) at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School, is based on a global survey of over 200 fintech companies across five retail-facing industry.

It covered six regions -- Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, the US, and Canada, and sub-Saharan Africa -- to take the pulse of the rapidly evolving fintech ecosystem.

The report found that the majority of financial technology companies hold a positive view of their regulatory environment, with 63 per cent rating it as adequate.Additionally, 38 per cent of surveyed fintechs cited the regulatory environment as a major supporting factor for their operations and growth.

However, a substantial portion of fintechs found regulatory compliance challenging and the licensing and registration processes to be problematic, indicating an area where policymakers and regulators could make improvements. *—PTI*

EXPANDING MARKET

Akasa Air, IndiGo, Air India order 1,120 planes in less than 1 year

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

With Akasa Air announcing an order for 150 aircraft on Thursday, three Indian carriers together have ordered a total of 1,120 planes in less than one year as they expand their presence in the country's fast growing civil aviation market.

The less than two-year-old Akasa Air has placed a firm order for 150 Boeing 737 Max planes, comprising 737 Max 10 and 737 Max 8-200 jets.

The latest order will provide the airline a steady aircraft delivery stream through 2032, cementing the company's domestic and international expansion plans, the airline said in a release.

About the new order, Akasa Air Founder and CEO Vinay Dube said this large and historic aircraft order puts the airline on a path of becoming one of the top 30 leading airlines in the world, by the turn of this decade.

In 2021, Akasa Air placed its initial order of 72 Boeing 737 Max aircraft and it was followed up with an order of 4 Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft in June 2023.

In 2023, which also saw domestic air traffic climbing new highs, Air India and IndiGo together placed orders for 970 planes with-Boeing and Airbus.

The domestic carriers are expected to take deliveries of more than 1,600 planes in coming years, according to an analysis *PHOTO: PTI*

Tata Group-owned Air India ordered 470 planes -- 250 from Airbus and 220 from Boeing -- in February last year. Later in June, the country's largest airline IndiGo announced an order with Airbus to buy 500 narrow-body planes.

Now, Akasa Air, Air India and IndiGo together have placed orders for 1,120 planes since February last year.

Besides these orders, Indian carriers are set to take deliveries of new planes that were ordered earlier. IndiGo alone has an order book of nearly 1,000 planes.

Grounded Go First, which has not been flying since May last year, had an order for 72 aircraft.

Together, domestic carriers are expected to take deliveries of more than 1,600 planes in the coming years, according to an analysis.

Currently, the fleet size of the Indian airlines is 730.

On Wednesday, Civil Aviation Minister JyotiradityaScindia said the fleet size of Indian carriers will reach 1,500 to 2,000 by 2030.

India is one of the fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Avani placed seventh at Australian Amateurs

MELBOURNE, 18 JAN

India's Avani Prashanth recovered from two double bogeys on the front nine with five birdies on the back nine before closing with a bogey in the third round of the Australian Amateur Championships here on Thursday.Avani carded a second straight 2-over 75 at the Par-73 courses. Avani, ranked 50th in the world and the top-ranked star from the Indian Golf Union, shot 72-75 on the first two days and is now 3-over 222 and in tied seventh place.The leader in the women's section is Amelia Harris, who had two eagles in her round of 5-under 68 and she is 9-under for three rounds. She is way ahead of second-placed Mamika Shinchi of Japan who carded 71 in the third round and has a total of 3-under.—*AP*

Hero WPGT: Sneha flies on twin eagles to win

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Sneha Singh played a superb closing round to grab her first win of the season in the second Leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday. Sneha, winner of the Hero Order of Merit in 2023, opened and closed the final round with eagles on their way to a card of 7-under 63. She rallied from four shots behind overnight leader Hitaashee Bakshi (68) to win by one. Sneha with 68-73-63 totalled 6-under 204 and Hitaashee, who finished runner-up for the second time in as many weeks, finished at 5-under 205. Ridhima Dilawari had a solid 2-under 68 and was third, while last week's winner, amateur Nishna Patel shot a 71. —*AP*

PHOTO: AP

Warner, Boult, Bravo to light up Int'l League T20

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The likes of Australian big-hitter David Warner and New Zealand pace spearhead Trent Boult will headline the second edition of the six-team DP World International League T20, beginning on Friday in the UAE.A total of 34 games will be played in the league including the final in Dubai on February 17. Dubai will host 15 games, Abu Dhabi 11 and Sharjah will be the venue for the remaining eight games. Former India batter Ambati Rayudu has also signed up for the competition and will represent Mumbai Indians Emirates. The other ILT20 teams apart from MI Emirates (Reliance Industries) are Abu Dhabi Knight Riders (Kolkata Knight Riders). —*PTI*

England Lions pin India to mat Patidar's quick 140

AHMEDABAD, 18 JAN

England Lions continued to dominate India A despite a rollicking unbeaten hundred from Rajat Patidar on the second day of their first unofficial Test here on Thursday. Patidar made 140 off 132 balls with 18 fours and five sixes but India A could only make 215 for eight at close, replying to England's mammoth 553 for eight declared in the first innings.India A are still trailing by 338 runs. Pacer Matthew Fisher led England's bowling with a four-wicket burst (4/57) while he received strong support from fellow pacer Matthew Potts (2/26) and left-arm spinner Callum Parkinson (2/43).—*PTI*

We have some options ahead of T20 WC: Dravid

T20 World Cup squad is not final: Rohit Sharma

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

India head coach Rahul Dravid was a pleased man after the 3-0 series win over Afghanistan as few fringe players performed well to give the team more options for the T20 World Cup in June.

India played 11 T20s after the ODI World Cup last year and the thinktank was able to have a closer look at some contenders such as Jitesh Sharma and Shivam Dube after frontline players were given a rest.

"Some areas we might need some addressing in, and we were thinking about it," Dravid said in his post-match press conference.

The only concern for Dravid was the lack of team time ahead of the showpiece to be held in the West Indies and the USA.

The three-match series against Afghanistan, which India won 3-0, was India's last T20 assignment ahead of the World Cup.

"Unfortunately, we really won't have much cricket as a team anymore. We will have the IPL, and you know, everyone will be watching closely to see how some of those guys play and what are the slots we need to fill in the team," he said.

Rahul Dravid and Rohit Sharma over *PHOTO: PTI*

- Was Rohit Sharma retired hurt or retired out? It was the question on everybody's mind as the Indian skipper walked back before the last ball of the first Super Over during the third and final T20 against Afghanistan, which the hosts eventually won to bag the series 3-0.As it turned out, it was pure gamesmanship from Rohit as India needed two runs from one ball to win at that stage and he wanted to use the better running abilities of third batter Rinku Singh to eke out that extra run.

Dube emerged as the player of the series against Afghanistan for his 124 runs and two wickets, and Dravid was excited to have an all-rounder option to consider.

"He's come back after a long time. He's certainly very much an improved player after coming back. There's no doubt that he always had the talent, but just happy to see the way he performed in the series.

"I'm sure it will give him a lot of confidence as well, you come back in and play a series and you become the man of the series. It's great and has certainly put his hand up. He's going to have that opportunity to show it in the IPL again like he did last year," said Dravid.

The squad is not yet finalized but in his mind, India captain Rohit Sharma says he knows about 10 players who will be part of the side in the ICC T20 World Cup to be held this June in the Americas.

—*PTI*

Josh Hazlewood celebrates his fourth wicket on day two of the First Test against West Indies at Adelaide Oval *PHOTO: AFP*

Hazlewood cuts through WI after Head's game-changing 100

ADELAIDE, 18 JAN

Australia was set to force an early end to the first cricket test against West Indies after taking five second-inning wickets late on the second day at the Adelaide Oval on Thursday.

The Caribbean side was 73-6 in its second innings and still trails Australia by 22 runs going into Day 3 at the Adelaide Oval.

Travis Head earlier scored 119 from 134 balls to help put Australia in a strong position with 283 runs and a first-innings lead of 95 runs.

Shamar Joseph took his third wicket on his debut for West Indies and Australia went to lunch Thursday at 144-5 and trailing the Caribbean side by 44 runs. The 24-year-old Joseph took the prized wicket of new Australian opener, Steve Smith, with his first ball in test cricket on the opening day Wednesday at the Adelaide Oval. Joseph added the wicket of Marnus Labuschagne before stumps Wednesday when Australia was 59-2. On Thursday, Joseph had new No. 4 batter Cameron Green out for 14. Pace bowler Joseph, who made 36 batting at No. 11 — the second-highest score in the visitor's innings — had figures of 3-52 at the lunch break.

Australia captain Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood took four wickets each as Australia restricted West Indies to 188 all out and made good use of the Adelaide Oval pitch after winning the toss and bowling first.

West Indies, which hasn't won a test match Down Under since February 1997, has brought only five players who appeared in the two tests against Australia in 2022-23 and added seven uncapped players to the touring squad.

The second and final test in the series, a day-night match at the Gabba in Brisbane, begins January 25.

West Indies 188 and 73 for 6 (McKenzie 26, Hazlewood 4-18, Lyon 1-4) trail Australia 283 (Head 119, Khawaja 45, S Joseph 5-94) by 22 runs. —*AP*

Uzbekistan's Sherzod Nasrullaev (13) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's third goal *PHOTO: AP*

Lacklustre India lose 0-3 to Uzbekistan

DOHA, 18 JAN

Bereft of ideas, a lacklustre Indian football team's woes were compounded by its defensive lapses, resulting in a 0-3 drubbing by a dominant Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup here on Thursday.

This is India's second successive defeat in Group B, having started their campaign with a 0-2 loss to title contenders Australia, in which their spirited performance earned them plaudits.

However, against the Central Asian nation at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium, India's performance was a far cry from their display against the Socceroos, a FIFA World Cup regular.

Uzbekistan scored through Abbosbek Fayzullaev (4th minute), Igor Sergeev (18th) and Nasrullaev (45+3) to register their first win in the competition after being held to a stalemate by Syria in their tournament opener.

Hoping to start on a positive note barely days after their promising show against Australia, India, instead, found themselves on the backfoot straightaway and conceded a rather soft goal early on.

The lightning-quick Fayzullaev, placed in a favourable position, found the target with a header past the hapless Gurpreet Singh Sandhu after Shukurov headed the ball towards him from a Nasrullaev cross taken at the edge of the Indian penalty area.

—*AP*

Chess players take part during the First Bangalore International Grandmasters open chess Tournament at Kanteerava Indoor stadium in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Daniil Medvedev beats Emil Ruusuvuori at Australian Open

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Just in the nick of time, Daniil Medvedev prevented his Australian Open campaign from veering wildly off course on Thursday night in Melbourne.

The third seed hauled himself to a 3-6, 6-7(1), 6-4, 7-6(1), 6-0 victory against Emil Ruusuvuori in an absorbing second-round clash inside Rod Laver Arena that ended at 3:40 a.m. local time. Despite Ruusuvuori delivering an impressive performance packed with clean baseline hitting in cool Melbourne conditions, Medvedev battled his inner demons to clinch a four-hour, 23-minute triumph.

"It was tough. I think the only two matches when I went two-sets-to-love down and won, it was here, on this court," said Medvedev in his on-court interview. "So that's a good memory for sure. This one is for sure going to stay in my memory, at 3:40 in the morning."

Daniil Medvedev *PHOTO: AP*

Medvedev cut a frustrated figure for much of his third Lexus ATP Head2Head clash with the Finnish No. 53 in the Pepperstone ATP Rankings. He made plenty of uncharacteristic errors in the early stages of the match, particularly off his backhand wing, but found a way to raise his game when it mattered most.

Having been just two points from defeat when trailing 4-5 in the fourth set, Medvedev raced through the tie-break to level at two sets all and then asserted his dominance in the decider as Ruusuvuori began to struggle physically. The Finn received treatment on his right shoulder from the physio and was ultimately powerless to stop the World No. 3 from charging to victory. —*AP*

Nagal crashes out after loss to Shang

RANCHI, 18 JAN

The higher they go, the longer they fall. Words that would reverberate with India's top-ranked player Sumit Nagal, as he crashed out of the Australian Open after falling to China's Juncheng Shang in four sets.

Shang overpowered Nagal in four sets of 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 to clinch the win and move on to the third round.

Nagal got the Chinese engaged in a baseline fight from the beginning and drew the first blood in the very first game of the match.

It was a passing forehand winner from Nagal that helped set up the first break point and then a lucky net chord handed him his second chance which he converted with the Chinese making a backhand error.

Sumit Nagal *PHOTO: AP*

Shang tried hard to get the break back by raising the intensity and power of his strokes but Nagal was ready to fight fire with fire and succeeded in opening up a 3-1 lead with consecutive holds.

—*AP*

FIH Oly Qualifiers: Italy beat Chile 2-1

RANCHI, 18 JAN

A resolute Italy defeated an equally determined Chile 2-1 in a shoot-out after both the sides were locked 2-2 at the end of regulation time to progress to the fifth-sixth place classification match of the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifiers here on Thursday.

In the first 5th-8th classification match, Chile took the lead in the 13th minute through Francisca Tala's field goal.Italy equalized seven minutes later through a field effort from Antonella Bruni.

The European side kept up the pressure on the Chilean defence and their efforts bore fruit when in the 24th minute, Federica Carta struck a field goal.

The third quarter was evenly-contested between the two sides and despite repeated efforts, they failed to breach each other's defence.

The final quarter too produced exciting hockey between the two sides with both the teams trying hard to score but failing to provide the finishing touch.

Italy defeated an equally determined Chile 2-1 *PHOTO: PTI*

However, just seven minutes from the final hooter, Chile equalized through a field effort from Paula Valdivia.

In the remaining seven minutes, both sides pressed hard for the winner but failed to get the desired result, forcing the game into a shoot-out.

In the shoot-out, Maria Inaudi and Carta scored for Italy, while only Domenica Ananias found the net from the spot for Chile.

—*PTI*

Forest, Everton move into FA Cup 4th round after troubled week

DUBAI, 18 JAN

Nottingham Forest and Everton shrugged off the threat of a potential Premier League points deduction as they battled into the FA Cup fourth round on Wednesday. Forest survived a scare to beat third-tier Blackpool 3-2 after extra time, while Everton were 1-0 winners against Crystal Palace in another of the night's third-round replays. It was a welcome tonic for Forest and Everton, who were both referred to an independent commission by the Premier League on Monday after admitting to breaches of financial rules.

The alleged breaches of the league's profitability and sustainability rules relate to the 2022-23 season and could carry a points penalty as punishment.

With Everton and Forest currently embroiled in a relegation battle, that would plunge their top-flight status into severe doubt.

Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford *PHOTO: AP*

Everton has already been deducted 10 points this season for exceeding the allowable loss thresholds at the end of the 2021-22 campaign.

The Merseyside club is appealing against that sanction, which ranks as the biggest points sanction in Premier League history.

Blackpool gave Forest a huge scare before Nuno Espirito Santo's side finally advanced to the last 32.

Andrew Omobamidele put Forest in front with a close-range volley in the 16th minute after Nicolas Dominguez's corner was flicked on by Ryan Yates. Gomes lifts Everton gloom

Blackpool keeper Daniel Grimshaw made a hash of clearing Albie Morgan's wayward backpass and Danilo swooped in with a close-range finish.

—*AP*

U-19 WORLD CUP 2024

GenNext takes centerstage as rivals out to halt India's dominance

BLOEMFONTEIN, 18 JAN

Many dreams will take flight and futures will be shaped when the Under-19 World Cup begins here on Friday with rival teams looking to halt the dominance of record five-time champions India.

The legacy of the Under-19 World Cup as a breeding ground for future cricketing stars is well established.

The tournament has unearthed a bevy of Indian stars Yuvraj Singh in 2000, Rohit Sharma in 2006, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja in 2008, Rishabh Pant and Ishan Kishan in 2016, and Shubman Gill in 2018 to name a few.

At the world level also, the tournament has produced players who went on to become legends of the game.

But at the same time, there have been many who have not been able to replicate the immense promise shown at the age group and they include the likes of Ravikant Shukla, Manish Pandey, Unmukt Chand, Yash Dhull, Manjot Kalra and Kamlesh Nagarkotti.

All eyes again would be on India, who will be led by Punjab's Uday Saharan. They begin their campaign against neighbours Bangladesh in Group A on Saturday.

Many dreams will take flight and futures will be shaped when the Under-19 World Cup begins *PHOTO: PTI*

Group A also features the USA and Ireland who will set the ball rolling in the opening match of the tournament that will run till February 11 with the summit clash in Benoni.

- Many dreams will take flight and futures will be shaped when the Under-19 World Cup begins here on Friday with rival teams looking to halt the dominance of record five-time champions India.

Sixteen teams are divided into four groups with the top three making the Super Sixes where 12 teams will be divided into two pools. The top two will then make the semi-finals, also slated in Benoni on February 6 and 8.

India this time did not have a proper build-up and arrived here after a series of National Cricket Academy camps and just two tournaments the Asia Cup and the recently concluded Tri-series in South Africa.

The journey has been marked by setbacks, including a semi-final exit at the Asia Cup, where the Saharan-led side lost to hosts and eventual champions Bangladesh by four wickets.

But the team's trajectory has seen a significant upswing since then, culminating in an unbeaten run to clinch the Tri-series in South Africa where Afghanistan was the third team.

The honors were shared by India and South Africa after a wash-out in the final earlier this month.

It remains to be seen if they're able to maintain their stranglehold on the coveted U-19 ODI trophy without extensive preparation.

Australia is the next most successful side in the tournament with three titles in 1988, 2002, and 2010, while Pakistan secured the title in 2004 and 2006.

—*PTI*